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SO NEAR AKIN.

A Novel.

BY

M. A. BENGOUGH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

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SO NEAR AKIN.

CHAPTER I.

A DRAMA OF EXILE.

SEVERAL days passed slowly and uneventfully, and, it must be owned, most drearily for Anne. Of George she saw and heard nothing, and, after their last parting, she felt little temptation to disobey his injunctions by seeking him out. With Emma Barratt she had had "words," when that young lady called in the morning to get back her bonnet and cloak; and for once Anne was worsted, not by wit, but by sheer force and copiousness of vocabulary.

Since then both parties had been in the sulks. The breach, however desirable, was perhaps not likely to be permanent, for Emma was far from implacable, and liked to patronize a girl whose beauty would scarcely compensate for her social deficiencies, as Emma understood society; and Anne, without a single companionable being of her own sex, was too forlorn to reject any future advances. For Mrs. Parsons could scarcely be called companionable, seeing that, so long as Anne knew her, she never opened her lips of her own accord, and when compelled to answer did so in monosyllables. Anne did her best to make friends with Susan, the wholesome maid-of-all-work, and if a greeting smile, like that of the sun in a picture-book, was any token of the young woman's feeling, she perhaps succeeded.

But Susan was a scarcely month-old

importation from the wilds of Somersetshire, and Anne had no point of contact with the bucolic mind. If she had talked Hebrew, Susan would have understood her nearly as well; but she made a point of grinning at everything Anne said, lest perchance she should leave some joke unhonoured, having hazily impressed on her mind some tradition that town-folks were always poking their fun. But a perpetual grin, and a few words at long intervals in a richly unintelligible dialect, fail quite to satisfy the craving of the heart for human intercourse; and Anne's spirits began to run very low.

She got to know her way about the town a little at last, but she found it was not a place particularly well adapted for the wanderings of an unoccupied young woman. The busy hustled her, morally and physically, and contemplative idleness

seemed to be a privilege reserved for the superior sex; for though she saw plenty of idlers about the wharves and docks, and at street corners, they were all men, and seemed to look with disapproval at any attempted invasion of their rights by an inferior creation.

Once she made her way up as far as to the Downs, on a still, blue-grey afternoon, faintly lit far off by yellowing horse-chestnut trees, but more effectually depressed, where she walked, by the russet of the wind-distorted hawthorns. The Welsh hills were only to be guessed at through faint haze, and the shrunken river, at lowest tide, slid on with oily slowness between deserts of light-brown mud. One or two nursemaids with their charges, and a distant undulating line representing the afternoon walk of a ladies' seminary, were the only points of human interest. We are told (on

doubtful authority) that Dr. Johnson once recorded an opinion, that the most beautiful landscape in the world is improved by a good hotel in the foreground. Anne was scarcely of an age to be susceptible to the charms of a good hotel, but she was as little devoted to unmitigated nature as the worthy doctor himself. She liked her landscapes well populated. As she slowly retraced her steps, with the weariness of depression, along that cheerfully named thoroughfare, Gallows-acre Lane, she registered a mental vow never to come again, and kept it.

Her chief resort came to be Queen's Square. Here she would come, avoiding the times when Emma would be passing to and from rehearsal, and sit for hours under the fading trees, beneath the shadow of the now nameless warrior on horseback. Here she could sit idle at pleasure, watch-

ing the goings and comings on the steps of the great, heavily dignified houses, till by dint of repeated observations she grew to have a personal interest in the inhabitants of each. Hence she could see ships —widening every horizon into which they enter—and at the same time could feel surrounded, though in exile, by a sober atmosphere of home.

One piece of good fortune was hers, during this forlorn time. The weather, though not bright, was fine; if she had been confined to the house, her lot would have been hard indeed. Even as it was, there were but too many dreary hours to be got through. How she did get through them she never knew—without books, without company, with no work more pressing than the repairing and refashioning of poor Aunt Theresa's shabby and rather eccentric wardrobe. As for her

voice, no one ever heard it now; she was as mute as a singing-bird in a season of cold and rain, as dumb as Memnon in the darkness.

One afternoon came a note from George. His father was dead, had died that morning, after a stupor of many hours, without recovering consciousness. The news, though it came upon her heart, hopeful and unused to loss, with a sort of shock, scarcely added to her sense of desolation. Their one brief interview had proved him dead already, to her; it did not seem possible for his actual death to have any influence on her future. She wondered a little whether George would come to see her; it seemed to her that this would be a seasonable opportunity for burying the hatchet, and she would have taken it kindly of him. But he did not come; she judged him sulky—a fault with which

she had no sympathy—and settled down once more to the weary waiting for her sentence, which still delayed.

George, meanwhile, went about the needful arrangements for the funeral with just so much solemnity of feeling as a thoughtful man will always have in the presence of mortality, and as a religious-minded man will bring away from beside any unsatisfactory death-bed. Anything much beyond this he did not feel, and, which seemed more strange, he did not reproach himself for not feeling it. He had really no sense of having lost a father, for the relations between them in life had been as little paternal on the one side as they had been filial on the other. The father had exacted no obedience, and desired no love. If ever there was a man unfettered in heart and act by domestic ties of any kind, it had been William

Paton. His son, unwillingly introduced to this irresponsible parent for the first time at the age of twelve, had neither the wish nor the power to strengthen or draw closer the bonds between them. His mother found her way through all his prejudices to his heart; his father, who had no turn for such investigations, remained for ever outside it, obtaining just so much outward deference as George could not well withhold from his mother's husband, and that was all. Under such circumstances, the survivor could not experience any keen regret. George's conscience acquitted him of any failure in actual duty, and with that it was, perhaps justifiably, content.

This being the case, William Paton's death resulted not, for George, in that breaking up of the fountains of emotion which so often washes away the barriers

of misunderstanding in some other quarter. He felt no more tender towards Anne, for he felt no extra call to tenderness in any direction. In fact, in the pressure of necessary business, he practically forgot her altogether. He came back from the funeral through "a dumb, death-dripping autumn rain," with a mind serious and even pitiful, but not closed to a relieved sense of a burden lifted from his future. What exactly might be implied in this he did not ask himself—took care, indeed, not to do so; yet the soft distilling rain seemed to be dropping peace into his heart, washing away a good deal of bitterness, and rustling such vague whispering hope as the showers of earliest February whisper to the frost-bound earth. In this mood he reached his lodgings, and took up a newly-arrived letter which was lying on his table. It was addressed in a handwriting he had

once known well. He lingered over it a moment, then he broke the seal.

Anne was crying over what the postman had brought *her*, when she was told that Mr. Paton was below and wanted to see her. She took the cruel paper in her hand and went at once, not careful to hide her tears or her forlornness. She went into the little front parlour and shut the door. George was standing by the table, white as death above his mourning, and with eyes which were strange to her. She did not greatly notice him, absorbed in her own distress.

"Oh, George!" she exclaimed, with fresh sobs, "it is as I said; I can never go home any more. Well, I was sure of that; but he need not have written as he does—oh, it would have been kinder to keep silence on and on! Did he fear I should not understand?" She glanced

again at the crumpled page, and indignation burned up her tears. "What have I done, then, so bad that he should dare to say such things to me? Such things! he should have felt it a degradation to put them into words. Here—'a disgrace to your family;' 'making us a byword among honest folk;' 'clothing your mother and sister with vicarious shame, that shame which the culprit herself——' Oh, I can't go on! Read it for yourself; yes! I ask it. Read it, that I may hear you give the lie to every vile implication, to every brutal word. Read!"

She dashed the paper on the table that stood between them. George did not take it up. With a gesture as of flinging down an unclean thing, he threw another written sheet upon it.

"I think I can trump that!" he said, with a laugh as strange as his eyes.

Anne cast a glance on it, then faltered, amazed into uncertainty.

"From Hester?" she said doubtfully; and as he only laughed again, she took it up. It was not very long, but the blood rushed into her face as she read.

"DEAR COUSIN GEORGE,

"If you had quite known how much your letter would distress me, I think you would not have sent it. I think you would not, for your heart was always kind. When I first showed it to my dear father he did not wish me to answer it, but that seemed ungracious—after what once was, I could not keep silence. At whatever pain to myself, I must write; perhaps some word of mine may reach across the gulf you have put between us, and find its way to your soul. *That* I may care for still; you know, George, I always cared for that.

Perhaps it would have been better if I had never done more; I cannot tell—there might have been less pain. But I did not write to reproach you. If your own conscience does not, my words can be of little use. You are wrong, you are self-deceiving, when you imply that a poor girl like me could influence your life for good. If I once had the dream, I have been punished for the proud thought; you are the best witness of how entirely I have failed. Let me beg of you to dismiss such thoughts from your mind; they only tend to weaken resolution and excuse delay; and, oh! George, after such a warning as you tell me of, can you venture to delay? My poor, poor aunt! And at the very time you were writing, when you would have us believe you penitent—I cannot write of this. Oh! George, why did you not send our darling back? If you could

see Sir Henry now, so grieved and patient, so crushed and yet so noble, you would be sorry. Be sorry still; try to think that though there are some things which can never go unpunished, there is nothing which, even while punished, may not be forgiven.

"I am, dear Cousin George,

"Your truest well-wisher,

"HESTER PATON."

When she had finished, she looked at him with a sort of apology. Her own wrongs seemed small beside his.

"It is not a nice letter," she said, almost timidly.

"You think not?" he said, as in surprise. "Such admirable sentiments, clothed in such suitable words! Oh! surely you have not noticed that; it is the perfection of style, so simple and un-

affected, so kindly and yet so very, very plain. Did you know she gave me a tract when we first met? She has improved since then; now she can compose them for the poor sinner, herself. Now there need be no more drawing her spiritual bow at a venture—and, by Heaven, she knows how to make her arrows tell! There are no lost shots there."

He took the letter up again, with an air of admiring criticism; he read it through once more, in silence, very slowly and carefully, savouring every word; and if he had any colour left to lose, it was gone by the time he had finished the reading. His lips twitched a little, and there was a slight dew upon his forehead; he looked like a man under torture, beginning to feel the extra strain imposed on the nerves by defiance.

"They told her what to write," said Anne, appealingly.

"An inspired epistle? Oh! yes, I see."

He caught his breath a little, then; tried a word or two more in the same strain—and broke down. Not tears; incoherent exclamations, imprecations, invective, a torrent, a whirlwind. Anne stood wide-eyed, trembling; her desolation came back upon her like a flood, before this unimagined, meridional passion, to which all her own wildest storms of tears and rage were but as the pettish fury of a child. She broke upon it with a little sob. The sound diverted the course of his passion, without stemming the flow of it for an instant.

"Ah! yes, you too," he cried; "they have made you suffer too. Sister criminal, the lash has found us both, you see, and we must each cry out in our own fashion.

It is not heroic, is it? but they will never know; we shall not tell of one another, shall we—you and I?" He came up to her with outstretched hand, and took hers unresisting. "That is what you said to me the night you came; do you remember? 'you and I.' And I was blind, and proud, I suppose—fancy *my* being proud! and all this time I could not see it. And yet it is so plain. Surely, from the beginning of the world, it must have been written of us two. Well, shall it be so? shall we fulfil our destiny?"

"What do you mean?"

"Marry me."

She snatched her hand away, stung to a keener resentment than by all her other wrongs.

"So you came to mock me?"

"Fate mocks us both, if you will; but not I you. I am in earnest."

"You would marry me?"

"I said so."

"Go away!" she cried, and every line of her figure spurned him. "You think, because you saw me cry—oh! I am only a woman, but I wish each tear had been liquid fire, so that the very torture must have kept them back, if you could dare to read them so! Cowardly I may be, but it is you who are a worse coward to come insulting me, in the very hour they have so shamed me, with a marriage offered—oh! say, flung at me—out of pity."

She stood absolutely resplendent in indignation, transformed in that hour, if only for that hour, from a girl into a woman. Blinded by his injuries and her beauty, exalted to a degree bordering on delirium, every latent force of purely physical passion set loose in the reaction

from Hester's petrifying spiritualities, George sprang forward as she recoiled.

"Not out of pity!" he cried; "out of admiration for a woman who dares to stand up for herself, whose soul is her own. Pity! who shall dare to pity you or me? You and I together can defy a world."

She hesitated. If he had spoken of love, she would have despised because disbelieving him; but this programme of mutual revolt attracted her in her present mood. She had learned how great, how overwhelming, are the odds against a woman who takes up the world's gage alone; here was an alliance, offensive and defensive, ready for her acceptance. Why should she reject it? She hesitated.

"How!" he said; "do you not feel that this is the hour for which you were created? I, an outlaw by my very birth,

you, a rebel from your cradle, scarcely knowing why; it was for me you were born. Your beauty, your bravery, your exile, all for me; and, ah! *how* beautiful you are, fair fellow outlaw! I tell you the conjunction is not of our seeking; I have struggled, you have struggled, and to what purpose, since it was against our fate? Fight it no more; it would be all in vain."

He caught her by the hands. With a last effort against a subjugation more than temporary, which she foresaw as in a vision, she drew herself back till the grasp on her wrists was pain. It did not relax; he drew her to him with an arm around her waist—a masterful clasp, and kissed her hotly on the lips. A thrill went through her; she was conquered, she owned her master, but at the same moment she felt herself a conqueror too. For the first time

she understood her beauty as a power ; *he* taught it her, with eye and touch, on whom, of all others, its power was destined to be least.

Within three weeks they were married. And still, before the light of reason, pitilessly calm, rose again upon their united lives, there was a pause. A few brief weeks were granted them in which, still seeing the world and one another lit up by the last leaping flicker of that fire of outraged love and wounded pride, which had seemed for a moment to fuse their unkinned hearts in one, they were able to believe they had done well.

CHAPTER II.

TWO OF HEARTS.

If a man have no latent powers of tragedy in him, the flight of his bride three days before her marriage is apt to make him ridiculous rather than effective. It would seem, on the face of it, as though passion alone could avert a certain contempt from the victim of such a catastrophe. Henry Stephens was as devoid of passion as he was correct in emotion; so it is a good proof that there really was something in him above the average, that he passed through the ordeal without the loss of a particle of dignity. Correct almost to

sublimity, his supreme propriety saved him, A commonplace man, if he had not erred by expression, would have erred by reticence; he would have jarred on the public ear by defiance, if he had not tickled it by complaint. Henry went through the whole of that perilous cadence of emotion, and never once touched a false note. Hester had done him cruel injustice in describing him as "crushed." As well describe the pensive willow as crushed, when it bends, gracefully submissive, to the bluster of the breeze. It was a caricature of his bearing.

The insult was most unintentional, and due solely to Hester's inadequate powers of description, not certainly to any lack of appreciation; in fact, all the time she could spare from mourning over Anne went to admiring Henry. He had always been the object of her simple hero-worship;

now, secretly, she dared to pity him. That she might do so seemed to make him more human, without making him less divine. It should be needless, by this time, to say that Hester Paton was not a strong-minded woman. This is not necessarily a matter for regret; there is a strength of heart in many weak-minded women, which stands them in far better stead than strength of mind. But Hester was not even strong-hearted. Tender and affectionate, pure and simple, she was; but not strong. The spotless, dainty little skiff of her affections was fitted for coasting voyages only; once out of sight of land—the land of tradition and sacred custom—she soon grew bewildered and alarmed, ready to sacrifice anything so she might get back safe.

The history of the letter which had decided George Paton's life was very much

what Anne had guessed. Hester had really loved George. Giving him up had cost her much grief, though no misgivings as to the propriety of the sacrifice. For long she carried a very sad and sore little heart about with her. Time, and the approval of her family, were healing the wound, however, when his most ill-judged communication came to tear it open afresh. What possessed him to write can never be known ; pondering on the deed, in the many sad sane moments that came in the after time, he never succeeded in explaining it to himself. The way they took it at Clapham was scarcely more explicable.

It seems impossible that Captain Paton should really have believed that his nephew could have sent Anne back by main force, against her will. Yet he assumed that this was what he ought to have done ; and from this indictment of neglect, he soon rose

to a positive accusation of having detained her; presumably out of mere revenge, for Captain Paton could not picture anyone as detaining Anne out of desire for her company.

He was wroth and Hester grieved, but neither was much surprised. George's wild words at parting had ruined his reputation with them for ever; they believed them to have been a deliberate renunciation of respectability. Neither father nor daughter was a creature of impulse, and George was so seldom carried away that they made no allowances for the exaggeration of passion in his words. So the letter got written. No one had literally told her what to say; still it was a mirror in which the family sentiments were fairly well reflected, albeit a little mistily, through tears. "Reprobate" was Captain Paton's; Hester's, the sigh which

breathed through her assent; the qualification, in itself a plea and a relenting, "but one who once loved me."

She was not happy when she had sent it off. She did not love George any longer, because she was morally incapable of an incorrect attachment. But you cannot disturb the oldest, most forgotten grave of a woman's love, how long soever dead, without raising a ghost. A ghost hung about Hester now; a formless and featureless sighing spirit, which drew sighs from her in sympathy. To ward off this spectral Cupid's darts, she took Minerva's thimble. She took a large basket full of poor clothes, and sat down in the old schoolroom to sew.

Unlike Anne in this, as in most else, Hester found in needlework an opiate, if not a panacea, for all human woes. As she sewed, she passed from sad to pensive.

Pensiveness suited Hester. She made a pleasant picture enough, sitting in the homely room in the autumnal sunshine, her graceful head bent over the glistening folds of white calico upon her knee, the swift needle gleaming rhythmically to the motions of her pretty hands, a gentle melancholy in her eyes and on her lips, a sort of resignation in all the lines of her figure. A knock at the door of the room did not alter her pose or her expression. She said "Come in," without raising her eyes from her work, supposing it was a servant. But when the new-comer remained silent, she looked up, then started to her feet with a little cry—

"Henry! I thought you were at Ridgelands."

"I had to come to town on business; I am going back to-morrow."

"You ought not to be here," said Hester

almost vehemently for her. From rosy red, that she had been in the first moment of surprise, she had turned quite pale. "It is not fit that we should dare to speak to you any more. We can be nothing to you in future. The best for us, the kindest in you, would be that you should forget our existence."

Henry smiled—like an autumnal sun on a funeral. He took her little trembling hand, and pressed it kindly.

"Dear Hester, that is not possible; nor, if it were possible, would it be desirable. Your intentions are of the sweetest, the best, I know; but believe me, dear girl, there is something a little morbid in the way you look at all this. And, of all things, in these trying circumstances, it behoves us to try and not be morbid. It is a temptation, I know; I feel it myself. But we must struggle against it; it can be overcome."

He ended with a sigh, heroically subdued, and pressed her hand again. She looked up at him for an instant, her face all rapt into admiration, then turned aside her head quickly, to hide the ready tears. She stooped hastily to pick up her work, and Henry allowed her the chance to recover herself; he went across the room to fetch a chair, which he placed near hers. Hester resumed her sewing with trembling fingers, and for a little while he sat and watched her in silence.

"Always busy!" he said at last, with a subdued playfulness.

"Oh! I must be."

"Yes," he said; "it is better, no doubt."

Two sighs this time, and another silence.

"And how is your dear mother? The maid told me she was out. I was glad to hear it, on her account, as it seemed to

permit a hope that her mind is recovering tone."

"I hope so; I cannot tell. Father is always trying to keep her up, and makes her go out with him every day. But I think she would be happier if he would let her cry more; and, above all, if she were allowed to talk of—of——"

Hester's own voice broke down.

"Ah!" said Henry; and on that subject he could hardly be expected to say more. After another pause he changed it. "I came to town to see about disposing of our old home. You know, I suppose, that my dear mother and sisters have kindly consented to establish themselves at Ridgelands. It is a great comfort to me, under the circumstances."

"Oh, Henry!"

"It seemed the wisest plan for everyone, for many reasons. We shall not, however,

go there immediately. They have, in their goodness, yielded to what is, perhaps, a weakness on my part, and we shall all spend the autumn and winter on the Continent."

This time, Hester exclaimed only with her eyes; their language Henry did not catch, for his own eyes were fixed on vacancy, and his thoughts fixed on himself.

"I have said it may be weakness, this wish to escape, for a while, from scenes which at every turn recall the past, and dreams of a future which now can never be. Yet, perhaps, I am judging myself too harshly. As our great dramatist has said, 'I must feel this like a man,' though I try, I hope not unsuccessfully, to bear it also like a man."

"You do; oh! indeed you do. But that you should have it to bear at all!"

"Dear Hester, what is there in me that

suffering should pass me by? I am human; to suffer is as human as—alas!—to err, and it is better to suffer of the two."

"You cannot deny, then, that you are in trouble?" said Hester sadly.

"I never attempted to deny it. Indifference would be as little to the credit of my heart, as the affectation of it would be to my understanding. Certainly I suffer, but," he added kindly, drawing his chair a little nearer, "not so utterly beyond hope but that sympathy may alleviate, though it cannot heal, the wound. The understanding sympathy of one who, after this sort, has suffered too."

Hester looked up with a swift, glad, surprise.

"You can think of that, out of your own grief! Oh! Henry, how good you are. But it is true that I have suffered; only

this afternoon that thought, of what might have been, kept coming back to me."

"And yet," said Henry, "I know—and do you believe it too—that some day, long as it may be first, 'this too will pass.' That which might have been may be bettered, little as we think so now, by what shall be. It is not in the power of any past to destroy the future of men or women whose lives, because their passions, are, under Providence, in their own control."

"No," said Hester, doubtfully, "I suppose not. But I don't know that I quite like to think that, some day, I shall care no more about—about all I must cease to care for, before I can forget."

"Sweet constancy!" exclaimed Henry, with a sort of regretful admiration; "keep an illusion which becomes a woman far better than would an assumption of cold philosophy. But, indeed, Hester," he

went on paternally, "I do not think that you need fear the hardening effects of time. If I know my little friend at all, you must cease to live before you cease to love."

She looked at him with worshipping eyes, shining through tears.

"Ah!" she said; "I feel strong and good when you are here. And you are going."

"Out of sight, yes; but I trust not out of mind."

"Can you suppose it? Often and often, when my heart seems heavier than I can bear and show myself cheerful, the thought of your unselfishness, your courage, will help me to be a little braver too."

"And often, when memory threatens to make me hard and bitter, the thought of a little girl who can believe in human nature and love it, even after she has been

wounded and betrayed, will help me to be more hopeful, more loving, too."

"Oh! no."

"Oh! yes," he said, gently despotic. "Dear Hester, it was not for nothing that our troubles have been similar; not even merely for our mutual comfort. It was for our mutual benefit, that each might be a moral helpmeet to the other."

"Do you think so?"

"I am convinced of it. I came to say good-bye. I expected little but added pain from the interview. But I was willing to submit to that, rather than give my friends the pang of suspecting an estrangement."

"Oh! Henry."

"Well, I am more than rewarded. I leave feeling morally refreshed. And it is my fellow-sufferer who has ministered to me."

He smiled. For such a smile Hester

would have let herself be cut in pieces, without a regret.

"Good-bye, dear friend," he said. "I go; but no traveller is all forlorn who goes accompanied by maternal love, and leaves friendship to keep a place open for his return."

The first thing Hester did, when she was left alone, was to sit down and cry. She would have been puzzled to account for her tears; certainly, she was far from being more unhappy than she had been before. Indeed, in spite of herself, her thoughts from this time forth drifted more and more into a new channel. The dull winter days —duller and sadder this year than ever before—were relieved, to her mind, by reflecting on the splendour of those southern skies beneath which Henry now moved. Her ideas of the Continent were vague, if magnificent; they were largely constructed

from the descriptions in Mrs. Hemans "Better Land." But she pined and fretted less, now that her thoughts had found an outlet into these gorgeous regions, and were not always thrown back upon the black mud and river fogs of Bristol; on Anne, shivering and coughing in a thin shawl, as she stood singing ballads at a corner of the street, under the fitful glare of lamp-light. The one picture was about as correct as the other; but the dazzling one gradually encroached with its brightness upon the Stygian gloom of her former imaginings, and no prosaic account of facts came to disturb an illusion which somehow made her happy. This silence, into which the whole Stephens family had passed, affected her little. She had never expected to hear; the almost abject shame, with which she thought of the wrongs they had suffered at Anne's hands, would have

shrunk from, rather than welcomed, such a condescension.

Still, with every consolation, this could not but be a melancholy winter. It passed somehow ; and with the spring, as it came slowly on, a little cheerfulness seemed to creep back into life. Over Anne's memory, to her mother and sister at any rate, there began to grow a certain dimness. They did not forget, but they remembered with greater resignation. They were more willing to believe that she might, after all, be prospering and not unhappy—a hopefulness born of an unconfessed desire to permit a little resurrection of happiness in themselves.

And travellers began to indulge in home thoughts from abroad. Henry felt he had spent a very improving, and fairly enjoyable, six months. The twins would have enjoyed it more, if there had been less

improvement. But even Henry could not quite destroy the pleasure of mere variety to young untravelled things, whose life hitherto had been one unbroken stretch of the deadliest monotony; and the twins heard with regret the order for return, which gave Mrs. Stephens the liveliest satisfaction. She felt that, now, her fondest dreams were on the point of realization. In a few weeks she would be installed as mistress of Ridgelands. On the evening that Henry issued his final marching orders, she forgave Anne, freely and from her heart, every pang the girl had cost her, every defeat she had endured in her long war with the bride-elect.

She sat castle-building over her wool-work, in the painful splendour of her Roman drawing-room—the crimson-and-gilt furniture, the walls hung with agonizing oil-copies of the Cenci, the Aurora,

and the rest of the consecrated victims of the copyist. Henry sat opposite her, his eyes bent upon a volume of Tasso. But as he could not read that immortal work without frequent reference to a dictionary, and as he had made no such reference for half-an-hour at least, it may be supposed that he too had his thoughts. *We* all know to what it is that a young man's fancy lightly turns in spring; but Mrs. Stephens lived before the world had been enlightened on that point, and Henry's abstraction awoke no suspicion in her mind. Perhaps she did not observe it, for he was the first to awake from his dream—if dream it had been.

"Shall you be quite content to start for home on the nineteenth?" he asked. "Because, if not, there are still many places of much historical and artistic interest, in the north of Italy, that would well

repay a visit, though it is getting too late for Rome. Or there are the lakes."

"There is not a town nor a lake in Europe, which could keep me a day," protested Mrs. Stephens. "In fact, I am quite willing to start earlier than you said."

"That is unnecessary. It would be a pity for Susan and Sarah to miss the Easter ceremonies and the illuminations, as we are here. Though objectionable from the highest point of view, they are a national feature so to speak, and in that light may be considered as among the educative incidents of travel. No, we will stay for them. But I am glad, dear mother, that you are so really willing to return. I confess I begin to long for England."

"Not so much as I do," she said frankly. "Oh, Henry, there are happy days before us, after all!"

"Thank you, mother. I accept the prophecy."

Something in his manner gave her a vague uneasiness. It was too buoyant. The prospect of settling down, a confirmed bachelor, in the bosom of even the most affectionate family, scarcely seems to call for more than a rather sober satisfaction. Still there was nothing she could take hold of; she went on in the same tone—

"I was sure that your own excellent sense would end by convincing you that everything has been for the best."

"I think I may venture to hope it will turn out so."

"You know I always said your engagement was a mistake."

"You did; and you were right. I know it now."

"But you wouldn't believe me at the time."

"Because at that time I did not understand in what the mistake consisted."

"Because you think too little of yourself. Everyone else could see that she was no match for you."

"We will not reopen that question, dear mother," said Henry, with a smile; "because, whether you are right or wrong, it was not there that the mistake lay. The error which I was on the point of committing, by uniting myself with Anne, was of a far more serious and fatal character than would arise from mere incompatibility of disposition."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have been blind; rather, perhaps, let me say dazzled. There was a spell upon me, that I should not understand my own heart. But now it is broken, and my eyes are opened."

"That is just what I said."

"Not quite, I think. You do not altogether understand me. Let me put it more plainly. It is not only that my affections were far less seriously engaged to poor Anne than I had believed, but I find now that (all unknown, of course, to myself) my heart had been already given elsewhere. A relation, which I thought purely fraternal, proves to have been, on my side at least, of a warmer and closer nature. This it is which is now so apparent to me—this what I am so thankful to have perceived before it was too late."

"You mean——?" said Mrs. Stephens, with a certain sharpness, born of anxiety. So sweet a dream to be so brief!

"Dear mother, I was sure you would understand. Yes; I mean that I love Hester Paton, that I have a good hope that she loves me, and that I am now going back to England to ask her to be my wife."

CHAPTER III.

MARRIED IN HASTE.

"'He worked and sang from morn till night,
No lark more blithe than he——'"

Anne gasped a little, after a shake which was not in the original

"'And this the burden of his song
For ever used to be:
I care for nobody, no not I,
If nobody cares,—no—bo—dy cares—cares——'"

The steps she had been listening to died away at the foot of the stairs; the house-door shut with a sort of controlled crash. Anne started from the easy inelegance of her position, swept aside the

breakfast things with a clatter, dropped her head upon her arm, and sobbed. The sunshine, refracted from the water near, danced like a live thing among the responsive brightness of her hair; kissed one instant her half-clenched hand, the next was dazzling the solitude with a gleam from the whiteness of her bowed neck. Outside, the midsummer air rippled the river and fluttered the flags upon the shipping till they danced like the sunshine; the sparrows jerked and chattered and bustled; there was a hurry and glow of life everywhere. It was, indeed, a buoyant day—a day for young things to dance in sympathy, body and soul; but Anne sat and sobbed.

She cried till she was tired, or till she was comforted; at last she raised her head, dried her eyes, and looked about her. Three-quarters of a year of marriage

had not much altered her in looks. She was no whit less beautiful, and but the merest trifle more mature. Yet even in looks there *was* a change, and not a change for the better. It was not that there were any signs of thought or anxiety. If matrimony had not altogether answered her expectations, it was not its responsibilities or cares that weighed upon her. "Her bosom's lord sat lightly on his throne," indeed, so far as that went. What looked so often now, out of the tell-tale window of her eyes, was the very spirit of revolt—an Ishmaelite possession which left her as little peace as it left others.

The lodging-house servant came in presently, and began to clear the table with rattling energy. Anne did not even move from where she sat with arms folded on the table; she merely raised

them to admit of the cloth being taken off, then, letting them fall again, sat on. The girl was used to her and took no notice. Anne put down this indifference to swell the sum of her injuries. Daily intercourse with George had not taught her personal dignity ; she cared nothing to conceal her feelings, and expected sympathy where she would more wisely have courted a judicious blindness.

Towards the middle of the morning, her solitude was broken in upon by Emma Barratt. Emma found Anne making a pretence at sewing, but she readily detected the traces of a recent storm ; it is true that no special acuteness was wanted for the discovery. She made no remark, however ; and if this reticence had been a sample of her usual conduct, it would have been much better for everyone. Unfortunately, it was quite exceptional, and

due only to her time being short and her interest centered elsewhere.

"Here's something that concerns you, ma'am," she said facetiously, slapping a stained and crumpled newspaper down on the table, in front of Anne. "What do you think it is? I'd make you guess, only I haven't time to stop a minute. I saw the paper, just by accident, at the coffee-house yesterday; some one that had been dining at that table before me must have left it there. The bit I mean just happened to be lying uppermost, so I took the liberty of carrying it off for you. Goodness! I wish I *had* time to make you guess, but I'm late now. Ta-ta! You're sure to know which bit it is—can't mistake it. I wonder if you'll show it to the master!"

She popped her head in again at the door for an instant, to deliver this last

happy thought, and was gone almost in the uttering. Anne coloured high, and pushed the paper disdainfully aside ; for the moment, vexation overpowered curiosity. That name for her husband was one to which she had a furious dislike—probably because of its inherent truth ; it was consequently what Emma never failed to make use of, whenever she felt a desire to tease, and that was not seldom.

But soon enough Anne drew the paper towards her, turning it over daintily, with a little grimace of disgust. Then took it up, and began to search. All at once she uttered an exclamation ; it ended in a curious little laugh, to which a blush added its own witness of embarrassment, for this was what she read :

"Fashionable Marriage.—The large and handsome church of St. John, at Clapham, was crowded, on Tuesday last,

with a numerous and fashionable assemblage, on the occasion of the marriage of Miss Hester Paton, daughter of Captain Paton, of that place, to Sir Henry Stephens, Bart., of Ridgelands, Gloucestershire."

Then followed the usual details—the costumes, the gifts, the guests, the bridal tour. Later on Anne read them all, and with an interest which, for her, was affectionate. But, just at first, she got no further than the bare fact.

It would be hard to say what she felt. The vague confusion, which had brought the colour to her cheeks with the first surprise, lingered still; but there was also, with a decided sense of amusement, a rather piquant perception of the strangeness of the situation. The series of events, which had led to this general change of partners among the quartette of a year ago,

appeared to her, for the time, as so many scenes in a tragi-comedy of which the *dénouement* was now first complete. But, in spite of her late woe, the comedy was more present to her mind than the tragedy. In fact, she could never think of Henry Stephens without an inclination to laugh. There had, indeed, been a time when a sense of hopeless oppression had made him hateful instead of ridiculous. But from the hour of her release his tyranny was forgiven and forgotten; thenceforth, he was again and for ever the good, the model boy, whose conscious and deliberate perfections had aggravated her in the nursery, and amused her riper years. Of Hester she never thought but kindly, and for her sake the news gave her a sincere satisfaction, which took the edge of sarcasm off her amusement. On the whole, the effect of Emma's little surprise was rather

soothing than anything else, and perhaps might have disappointed the young lady, who liked a sensation, and was not particular as to the means she used to procure it.

However, there was still George to be told—or not told, as the case might be. Either course had its perils, as Anne felt; she was content to leave the decision to the chapter of accidents. It is true she had learned to be afraid of him, but fear did not extend to producing caution; hitherto it had but just sufficed to ensure obedience. Perhaps the exercise of authority, which had removed her from the stage just as she was beginning to feel the intoxication of success, would have roused her to active defiance, in spite of fear, had she not cherished a belief (unwarranted by any hint of his) that her retirement was only temporary. In her

own mind she had settled that, when a certain prospective event was over, she should certainly return to the scene of her triumphs.

For it had been that; but it was more than that. To Anne, her first appearance had been nothing less than a revelation to herself of her vocation, and there are few satisfactions to equal that discovery. For a time, at least, it seems to give a key to every mystery of life.

Anne's vocation may not have been intrinsically high or beautiful, but such as it was it was genuine, and she was single-minded in her devotion to it. Unfinished, and comparatively inartistic, as her performance was as yet, she had the makings of an artist in her; with training and education, she would have a brilliant career before her. But at present she thought little of art or fame; for present

satisfaction it was enough that she had found an outlet of expression. She threw herself into her parts,—the most trivial even,—with an ardour which rather amused her more hardened and less imaginative companions, but which seldom failed to wake some corresponding emotion in her averagely unimpressionable audience.

She herself had begun to find it exhausting work, seeing that she did not so much simulate passion as evoke it, out of her own real soul, night after night. Under the circumstances, she was tolerably willing to acquiesce in her husband's order of resignation. She resigned, to the flattering music of regrets and protestations, which she knew to be unfeigned. But since that time, not many weeks ago, she had found life incomparably dull; dull in spite of the connection which she kept up, so far as she dared, with all and

any of her brother and sister professionals, not to mention stage-struck devotees from the untheatrical world, who courted her society. And dulness alone would have sufficed to make Anne irritable.

For the present it had to be borne ; for the present she was condemned to a Darby and Joan existence, of all others the least congenial to her. To George it might have been congenial enough. By nature, as well as by early training, he belonged to that great sober middle-class of England, whose solid and domestic virtues defy, in the aggregate, the influence of the corruption of luxury from above and of the corruption of lawlessness from below. A little wife to preside, with the smile of perfect content, at his neat and simple board ; to help him on with his coat and hat, and start him off for the office with the kiss that was her benediction of his

day ; the sentiment of work, worth doing, well done and justly appreciated ; a return, in the evening, to all that Englishmen understand by *home:* these, and such as these, would have been the details of his ideal life.

With such fundamental tastes he had taken unto himself, with him to be united so long as life should last, a nature as essentially impatient of routine as his was zealous for it. Anne, an artist to her finger-tips, and in the truest instincts of her being a daughter of the people—that people among whom self-restraint, in any form, is the rarest of virtues—belonged as little to the *bourgeoisie* as she did to the aristocracy. She belonged, in fact, to nothing, save that great class of the unclassified which wanders up and down society,—the gipsies of the social world.

This was scarcely a combination likely

to produce satisfactory results in married life. It was nothing to the purpose that George himself knew moments of revolt, in which renouncing, even blaspheming, the respectabilities, the limitations, so dear to his soul, he would throw in his lot with the vagabond and the socially proscribed. For his repentance for such apostacy was swift and certain, the reaction protracted and strong.

On this occasion it had begun to set in within a very few weeks of his marriage. At first, he found peace in confining his own connection with the theatre strictly within the limits of professional attendance. With Anne, at this time, he did not interfere further than by remonstrance. He resumed, too, those religious practices which were instinctive with him in a normal state of his moral being. Here Anne, who, so far as her own consciousness was

concerned, had about as much soul as a brownie, could not follow him at all. Their first serious difference was her flat refusal one Sunday to accompany him to church. On the first Sunday of his return to the old ways, she had gone too—partly from *ennui*. As Emma and others had presumed to laugh at her, she made a point of going the next Sunday also, and the next after, out of defiance. At that period some other excitement put Anne's small affairs into the shade; she was left in peace, and to this indifference she succumbed. At first she did not openly rebel. She developed an affection of her school-days, known as "church headache." For a while this was successful. George, who had every reason for wishing to believe, allowed himself to be willingly and pityingly convinced. But of course this could not last for ever. One Sunday,

when he had come home to find her gone for a row up the river, with a party of Emma's arranging, he flatly accused her of shamming. She refused to defend herself, sulked for half an hour, and then changed the subject. But next Sunday she discarded stratagem, in favour of open war; and by threatening hysterics (she had learned a good deal in the last few months) she gained her point. Few men have nerve for tyranny in the face of that threat, even under ordinary circumstances. As it was, a brute alone could have insisted. George was neither a brute nor a tyrant, and just then too sick at heart, too much disgusted with his own irrevocable folly, to have much spirit for the fray; he yielded, and finally, for he never asked her again. But Anne had little joy of her victory. Henceforth when she saw him start, stern and solitary, to his de-

votions there would come upon her something like a repetition of the pang she had felt, in the theatre, at his averted gaze. It was in his silence that this creature of outspoken emotions first learnt to fear him.

Time went on, and George's conscience began to grow; also his responsibility for his wife's spiritual well-being troubled him now, at intervals. One night, on his way to the theatre, he saw for an instant, through unclosed window-blinds a lamp-lit picture of family life, taken in the confidence and ease of perfect unconsciousness —such a picture as groups itself by hundreds and thousands, night after night, in the middle-class homes of England. Very commonplace; but there is a strange chord of emotion touched by these warm, golden visions of domesticity, seen for one instant, from without, by the darkling wayfarer, to

be lost, the next, for ever—bright as the intermittent glimpse of Paradise to outcast souls, of the Danish writer's dream; and no less transient, no less unattainable than that. George looked and passed, and in an instant his heart was full of tears.

> "'Those are the hills of heaven,' he said,
> 'Where you shall never win.'"

Yet, if repentance could have availed, he had won it there and then.

In the theatre he found Anne. She had gone on earlier, with Emma, ostensibly because she needed extra time to dress. But he found her, in her walking-dress, her bonnet swinging in one hand, in the midst of a group among whom she had long since learned to hold her own, engaged in a friendly word-fencing match against all comers. Eye, and hand, and feature, all were in full play; thrust and parry, anon a palpable hit greeted with

shouts of laughter, her own silvery-clear above them all. Every moment she seemed on the point of provoking some intolerable liberty; every time she warded off the danger, if only by a hair's-breadth, and the keenest observer could scarcely have said whether she escaped by force of unconsciousness, or by strength of nerve. George's nerve was perhaps less steady. With that burden of forfeited happiness on his soul, to come straight upon such a scene as this gave point and energy to his repentance. He made no protest by word or look, but he vowed to himself that this should cease. Happiness he might have lost; self-respect it was still not too late to recover. Every possible excuse for retirement existed, but he would have cared little if there had been none. However, Anne's comparative willingness spared him something, and George was not unthankful.

For himself, thanks to his testimonials from Mr. Higginbotham, and to the interest of the clergyman of the parish, who claimed him in good faith as a convert, George soon found a situation in a mercantile house, and at a salary which more than compensated for the loss of Anne's earnings. So far his ideal programme was carried out, but no further. Too often he left Anne in tears; too often came back, in the evening, to find her either out, or surrounded by the last kind of company he approved. The more peaceful evenings were the dullest; but it was George, who felt the actual dulness less, who felt remorse more. Anne quarrelled and yawned through her conjugal existence, with little distress of conscience, and as little resentment against her companion in misfortune, whereas George felt both. But Anne had never been burdened with any high ideal

of matrimony, either of its duties or of its bliss. On the whole, she thought they did not get on much worse than most other couples of her acquaintance; she was too little disappointed to be bitter, or even seriously discontented.

Anne was not much accustomed to study her husband's mood. But this night she did wonder what it would be at his home-coming, as on that depended how she should introduce the subject of Hester's marriage, or whether she would introduce it at all. Unfortunately, she herself contrived to ensure his being in the worst possible temper, for she came back, flushed and breathless with unavailing haste, to find that he had been waiting nearly half an hour for tea. He looked up frigidly when she came in, but did not speak. This silence, which he considered self-command, Anne thought aggravating sulki-

ness. It used to act on her temper like oil on fire; but George, strong in the consciousness of virtue, since it was with a real effort he refrained from stern rebuke, never could be brought to understand the effect his silence had on her. Now she tossed her hat on to one chair, and her scarf on to another; then, flinging her own lovely person into a third, in front of the tea-tray, she suddenly announced that she was too hot and tired to pour out tea. Besides she had just had some, and did not want any more. George must pour out his own.

George rose unremonstrating, but frowning ominously, poured himself out a cup of chilly tea, and sat down to eat, with what appetite he might, in the untidy room. Anne, fanning herself feebly with her handkerchief, and apparently in the last stage of exhaustion, watched him

constantly through her half-closed lids, beneath which angry flashes now and then belied her apparent languor.

"I do so wish," she said plaintively at last, "that you would do as I have asked you again and again, and not wait for me when I am late. It isn't much to ask, and it would save me a great deal of worry and fatigue."

Here she sighed, and, with a weary gesture, sank into a condition more exhausted than before. The astounding injustice was too much for George—as she meant it should be.

"It seems to me," he said, throwing down his knife with a clatter, "that it is not much for *me*, to ask that you should manage to be at home to receive me. So much attention I think I have a right to, as a matter of common courtesy. Of affection, I am quite aware, there is no question any more."

"It was never in the question you put to me originally, George dear, so far as I remember," said Anne sweetly. "But I am so glad you take that common-sense view of things: sentiment, as you say, is so very much beside the purpose, between us two. Now I can follow you. As a matter of common courtesy, then, I fully intended to be back; but I didn't know the time."

"It was impossible to find out, of course."

"Yes, dear; because I haven't a watch —now." She suppressed a sigh, effectively. "Henry Stephens gave me mine, you know; and of course I had to leave it behind me when—It would have been almost dishonest to keep it, wouldn't it? You wouldn't have liked me to keep presents from Henry Stephens, dear, would you?"

"Silence!" he cried, bringing his hand down so heavily upon the table that Anne started unaffectedly. "If you have no respect for yourself, I request that you will respect me. Understand that such allusions are intolerable."

"Very well," said Anne, meekly. "Though if the remembrance is not too painful for me, I'm sure I don't see why it should affect you."

He seemed on the brink of a torrent of speech; but no words came. But his eyes were terrible; and now a sheer longing for excitement took possession of Anne, and the very terror drew her on.

"Yes, dear, I know what you were about to say. Pray speak out, if it is any relief to your mind; don't hesitate on my account. I'm not easily offended; besides, on this point, I dare say we are

pretty much of one opinion. You would like to say, what a fool you were to marry. Well, dear, there were two of the kind when we did; we are quits, so far. And if we haven't done particularly well for ourselves by our marriage, we shall always have the comfort of knowing that we have been the means of making two other people very happy. Look."

She carelessly tossed over the newspaper, which she had taken from her pocket. Then she drew a long but silent breath, and sat watching him intently, with the sort of awful pleasure with which a little boy watches his first surreptitious experiment with a slow match.

She watched him read the paragraph through to the end; watched him sit looking at it then, in a silence measured out by the nervous beating of her heart. Once he looked at her for a moment,

with a look almost of horror; she felt the blood ebb from her own cheek as she beheld. It seemed to her ages that they had been sitting so; every feeling was swallowed up in a sickening dread of what might follow. When, at last, he rose and came towards her, she actually buried her face in her hands with a slight scream.

He came and stood over her, and pulled the hands away, not roughly but with decision; he looked at her for a while, with a look too like pity for her to understand.

"God forgive you, child," he said, very quietly, at last, "for the harm you wished to do. If you ever thank Him, you may well do so to-night, that such harm is out of your power. Because I tell you, once for all, that, so far as any sentiment or regret on my part is concerned, that story is over. For ever."

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW MANAGER.

For some time after the news of Hester's marriage, the ill-assorted couple got on a little better than usual. Anne had been frightened to some purpose and refrained from aggravation, so far as it was in her nature to do so. In another way, too, the scene had had a pacifying effect upon her. George's words had cleared away a feeling which was rather pique than jealousy. That is to say, Anne was but little hurt at knowing that he regretted having married her; but she would have been prepared to resent a

regret that he had not married somebody else instead. Now that he had disclaimed any such feeling, she recovered the self-complacency which the imaginary comparison had slightly impaired. It never occurred to her to doubt his word; he had never given her cause to do so. And it was natural, perhaps, that the truth should surprise her less than it had surprised George himself, when he had first discovered it.

For it was the truth. His feeling for Hester, indeed, had become so unimpeachably fraternal, that its very kindliness was strongly tinged with that frequent brotherly sentiment—contempt. George's was a nature which had no pity for moral weakness. When he had once fully realized Hester's, his love died naturally with his reverence, of which it had been but a sort of splendid parasite.

Moreover, little as he loved Anne, there was a colour, a brilliance of vitality about her, which had their effect upon him. His life was not more pleasant since she had come into it, but it was certainly more alive. Since he had grown accustomed to this vigorous, if elfish, personality, Hester appeared to him, in memory, even more vague, more of a mere reflection, than she really was.

Nevertheless, he had been considerably shocked at Anne's experiment on his feelings. He gave her credit for much more malice and deliberation than she had really been guilty of; more, in fact, than a creature so superficial was capable of exercising. Reckless enough she was, perhaps almost non-moral; he scarcely realized that, to have put into her experiment the amount of calculation he seemed to see in it, she must have been depraved.

For though he was both angry and scandalized, he did not analyse the thoughts which had made her action appear scandalous.

And if he had been more angry than he was, the time soon came when nature herself stepped in as a peace-maker. For there came a sunny September afternoon when Anne, more beautiful than ever before in the softening of physical weakness, more radiant in the first natural pride of maternity, lay all white and gold like a lily; and, beside her, the tiny featureless crimson creature, crowned already with a filmy halo of red-gold fluff, which was her first-born.

After this, for a while, all went on harmoniously. Anne was proud and fond enough of her baby to satisfy all reasonable requirements, and, so long as she was physically incapable of exertion,

played the devoted mother with equal satisfaction to herself and to George. She was the more content to keep tolerably quiet, even after she was able to get about again, that there was, just then, an interregnum at the theatre.

Mr. Wellings had gone the way of most of his predecessors in that concern—that is, to bankruptcy; and the valuable property, which represented his total assets, was in the hands of his creditors, who had not yet succeeded in finding any one sufficiently unenlightened, or sufficiently enterprising, to relieve them of it. The company, for the most part, was dispersed. A few, who could not find engagements, or who listened with more faith than the rest to the constant reports of a new lessee having been found, still lingered on, and among them was Emma Barratt.

It was not with her good-will that she

stayed, and she had the satisfaction of maintaining, to all hearers, that she could have got engagements again and again. But, at this point, papa Barratt, plumber and glazier, was minded to interfere. Emma, he said, might go if she liked; but it should be to respectable service, not to go starring about, with a pack of impudent jackanapes and giddy hussies—to say no worse—and never a soul to be answerable for her goings on, or to whom she need be answerable. She had a deal too much of her own way already; the more fool he, maybe, for allowing it. But there's bounds to everything; and here he should put his foot down. He put it down, in effect, noisily, and with a form of asseveration more forcible than polite. Emma replied at some length, and with vigour, but knew she must submit. Meanwhile she lived on hope and odd jobs of

needlework. But the plumber had begun to get impatient, and Emma was hoping to force his consent to her becoming a barmaid, before the new lessee and manager really did arrive.

He was heralded by an advertisement in the theatrical papers for ladies for the ballet and for the chorus, also for supers for the pantomime of Aladdin. And in a few days flaming posters, and the local press, began to inform the general public that the theatre would be re-opened on Boxing-night, with the gorgeous pantomime of Aladdin, to be produced on a colossal scale, and in a style of magnificence never before attempted in the provinces.

Emma lost no time in applying. It was unpleasant to have to begin again on the lowest round of the professional ladder; but she trusted to her charms

and to the favour she had always enjoyed from Bristol audiences, to ensure her rapid promotion. She readily obtained an engagement, and the piece was put in hand forthwith.

The new manager was evidently a man of energy and courage in speculation. The dingy theatre soon swarmed with carpenters and painters; the wardrobe glittered with costumes to which it had long been a stranger; a local artist was discovered, who blossomed into unexpected genius as a scene-painter. The promise of the advertisements seemed more likely to be fulfilled than such promises are, as a rule. If the new manager failed in his turn, he was clearly prepared to fail nobly.

And not only nobly, but gaily. The whole look and manner of him seemed to say that misfortune might as well attempt

to overwhelm him as you might try to drown a cork. He maintained his managerial authority; but with what charming sprightliness, with what delightful jocoseness! No *contretemps* could ruffle his temper; he laughed at frowning fortune, till the corners of that fickle but humorous goddess' mouth gave way, and she laughed back. He had defied her even in the matter of his looks; she had made him ugly, but ugliness in him was fascinating. To add to his attractions, he was a bachelor; the certainty that he was in no hurry to change his condition had no effect in checking pursuit. And as his light-hearted amiability made the chase quite as agreeable to him as to the pursuing nymphs, every one was pleased, and the gay quarry, at any rate, had never been seriously hurt.

All these particulars, by degrees, and

in her own choice vernacular, did Emma Barratt impart to Anne. Of Anne, to the manager, she did not speak. She felt no call to reveal the existence of a star, before whose lustre her own had already paled. And Anne, understanding that there was no opening, for the present, of any kind that she would care to accept, made no allusion to a return to the stage. She sat at home, sewed for her baby, played with it, and seemed content.

One afternoon it chanced that George Paton's business took him to the docks. The shortest cut to his destination led him close by the theatre. As he passed, he raised his eyes to it, as he seldom failed to do, in an impulse of devout thankfulness for his escape. And so looking, he beheld a figure which, owing to a momentary failure in presence of mind, made him pause and look again. It was

many years since he had seen it; from a rather ungainly youth Horatio Timbs had become a man, but George could not be mistaken in him. That lank but vigorous figure, lounging yet alert, leaning up against the door; that hollow yet humorous eye, looking as if the orbs of the laughing philosopher were twinkling from the sockets of a death's head; that long, sallow, hatchet face, with the mobile mouth, which, at every moment, forced nature to contradict her own melancholy design—all these could belong to him alone.

These two had been good friends, in their own fashion, years ago; yet now George felt no impulse but one of annoyance at having been betrayed into a recognition which was evidently mutual. In an instant Timbs was across the street, and doing everything short of

embracing him, in a transport which was by no means mutual. Knowing with whom he had to do, George was more disgusted than surprised at finding himself presently walking across Queen's Square arm-in-arm with the new manager. There was nothing encouraging in his own manner, but he might just as well have been cordial; in fact, if he could have brought himself to be so, the situation would have been less visibly ridiculous. For repression was wasted on his companion; George knew it of old. As for reserve, he had no chance of maintaining that, against Mr. Timbs' singular knack of putting leading questions, combined with his powers of intuition. Before the end of ten minutes, he had discovered to this cheery inquisitor everything concerning his past, present, and future that Horatio had any curiosity to know.

He ended by inviting George to spend the evening at his lodgings. George excused himself, but regretted it the next minute, as Horatio thereupon declared his intention of looking *him* up some day shortly. A person of readier and more unscrupulous invention might have averted this calamity also—for a calamity George felt it to be. But for him there seemed no loop-hole for escape. When, at last, he succeeded in shaking off his companion, he felt as though the old life, more hateful now than ever, had got a clutch on him again. Of that hold he could not, as yet, estimate either the nature or the power; but the first touch filled him with shadowy forebodings.

A few days after this, on his return from the office, where he had been detained till rather late, he heard, while yet on the stairs, a peal of Anne's giddiest

laughter. On entering he found the manager, as he had expected. Horatio gave him a cordial welcome to his own home, with a sublime audacity which was his alone.

"Here you are at last, old fellow. I thought you were never coming. Well, as the poet says, 'Better late than never.' And now I vote that—as he goes on to sing—'Polly put the kettle on, and we'll all have tea.'"

At this exquisite witticism Anne went off into another fit of mirth. She was evidently in wild spirits. The sudden reaction to frivolity, after weeks of taking life seriously, seemed to have made a different creature of her in a few hours. The playful yet discreet matron and mother, who played her part with such piquant grace, was gone. It was the old Anne sat by his hearth to-night—the old

Anne, who could never give to that hearth any feeling of home; to whom art and freedom sufficed for happiness; whose heart, if it existed, seemed entirely unawakened, devoid of all such requirements as women use to have.

They sat down to tea, as Mr. Timbs had suggested. It was a much more lively meal than usual, though, for all practical purposes, the party was no larger. For George did little but represent the skeleton at the feast, and had no more effect than that on the spirits of the other two. Horatio, who flattered himself he had made a valuable discovery for his new venture, was overflowing with delight. Anne, who had certainly said nothing to disabuse him of the notion, was no whit behind him in satisfaction. He rattled and she laughed; the place was transmogrified.

When he had temporarily exhausted his flow of jest and anecdote, they took to reminiscences.

"Do you really remember that night at Guildford, Mr. Timbs?"

"Could I forget?"

"Oh! easily. Why not? It was nothing to you; an incident in a life full of incidents. To me it was the one thing fit to be called an event that happened to me in eighteen years. Before it, nothing; after it, nothing. Think of that!"

"Dreadful! But you can't remember as well as I do, or you would know that you were too flattering to let me forget you."

"No! How?"

"My beautiful name!"

"Oh! your beautiful name." She went off into another peal of laughter.

"Ah! you laugh now. And I dare say you have forgotten that too."

"I haven't."

"I don't believe it."

"You needn't. But because I remember it, there is no reason why I should keep the same opinion of it,—Mr. Horatio Valentine Timbs."

All George's sense of dignity could not repress a movement of disgusted impatience. Neither saw it.

"Thank you; I am quite content. And your singing—of course you have kept that up."

"Oh, I don't know. I sing sometimes—to the baby. Don't I, George?"

She said it with a meek demureness that was irresistible. And from behind her lowered lashes her eyes danced and shone like two Will-o'-the-wisps. It was Mr. Timbs' turn to laugh now, and he did it with relish. Then Anne laughed too.

"Well, have you got any nice songs in your pantomime?" she asked. "You know, I think it was horridly disagreeable of you not to keep a good part for me in that."

"You forget I did not know of your existence. But it will be a matter of unavailing remorse to me for ever."

George did not remonstrate, because he could not bring himself to believe that either remark was serious.

"But the songs?"

"Aladdin has two you might approve. One as a street-boy, with a good many local hits, pretty sure to take; and a love-song later on."

"The first one sounds as if it might be rather fun," said Anne, meditatively. "Is it anything like this?"

She pushed back her chair, but without rising. Then, in a sweet shrill soprano—

the very glorification of a *gamin's* voice and style—she began to sing. The words were reasonably audacious; the tune horribly catching, the sort of thing predestined to a long purgatory of barrel-organs and music-halls. George Paton's wife trilled away, as unmoved as if she had been chanting a psalm in Hebrew. Now and then she would catch the eye of an imaginary audience, and deliver a point with a certain twinkle which, if it was not personal enjoyment of the hit, looked very like it. Now and then she would indicate, rather than make, a gesture. It was all tolerably *canaille;* but so bewitchingly *canaille*, so interwoven with the gleam of golden hair, the saucy sparkle of brightest eyes, the flashes of the loveliest of hands!

At first Mr. Timbs had listened with an amused smile, then he began to look

puzzled, afterwards amazed; at last, all feelings were merged in pure managerial delight. As she finished, he broke into rapturous applause. Anne jumped up to drop a mocking curtsey, and sat down again, eyes and voice brimming with mirth.

"Well," she said, "did you ever hear anything like that before?"

"Never—in one sense. But as far as words and music go, how is it possible? I am amazed, confounded! It is Aladdin's song itself, which has never been out of manuscript. How in the name of all that's wonderful, could you——"

"Oh, I'm a witch, you know," laughed Anne, shaking out golden curls and a chime of elfish silver laughter.

"Upon my soul, I believe you!" exclaimed Horatio, staring at her with very frank admiration.

It confused her not at all.

"Then, to reward you for admitting it, I'll explain this piece of magic. Emma Barratt knows it by heart, of course, from hearing it at rehearsal, and I learned it from her. Oh, stupid!"

With which elegant peroration she went off into another clamour of bell-like merriment. This was all very well—song and laughter were both exquisite of their kind—but they were unwonted sounds at that hour and in that place, and they had their effect. From an inner room came a faint cry. Anne, laughing on, heard nothing. She was taken by surprise when George flung an imperious "Hush" across the torrent of her mirth.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Can't you hear? You have waked the child with your foolishness."

By this time the cries were unmistak-

able and urgent. Anne jumped up impatiently.

"Oh! plague take the child!" she exclaimed.

It was one of Emma's flowers of speech, such as had taken root so kindly in Anne's vocabulary. She uttered it hastily, with a comical exaggeration of annoyance; but in George's ears it pealed like unnatural blasphemy. Anne had really no suspicion that the exclamation had filled the cup of her iniquities for that evening; the gloom of his face, as she caught a glimpse of it in going out, she interpreted by a man's natural objection to a crying child.

If Mr. Timbs had at first thought the same, the tempest-breathing silence which fell upon the room with Anne's departure, soon undeceived him. That love of a quiet life, which was the chief principle he could boast of, made an excellent storm-

signal for him on all occasions. On the instant he was aware of a severe depression advancing towards both Anne and himself, and, with a tolerably easy regret for her inability to escape, he set his own helm hard round and made sail at once for port.

As his hand was on the lock the door was opened from without. Anne stood on the threshold. The child had pulled down her hair; she seemed to stand in the midst of a flood of sunshine. On one arm she negligently held her infant, the other hand was putting the "crisping golden wire" out of her eyes. She wore the triumphant expression of a child about to exhibit a new doll, as she thrust the blinking baby upon Mr. Timbs' rather unwilling attention.

"Come," she said; "kiss her, Mr. Charles, for old sake's sake. Don't be

frightened; *she* won't bite—nor box your ears, you know."

She lifted the baby towards him, watched delightedly his reluctant movement, then, as he bent, snatched the child away. His admiration for what he thought her pluck, (which was mere unconsciousness of any impending dread), overcame his prudence for a moment.

"Not the rose?" he said, with ill-feigned regret. "Then, at least, let me taste what grows near the rose."

He bent his lips to her free hand; she applied it unhesitatingly to his cheek—not too hard.

"Oh! go along, do!" she cried, blushing like a rose herself.

He went, with promptitude. Anne was left face to face with her husband.

The baby, recalled to a sense of its wrongs, began to cry again. Before its

mother had time to soothe it, George stepped across the room and took it from her without a word. Anne stared a moment, then woke all at once to a perception of something wrong.

"What's the matter, George?" she asked lightly. "You don't seem to have much enjoyed your evening."

"You have."

"Rather!" said Anne, with emphasis.

She felt she was in disgrace, deserved in a degree, but still deep beyond her deserts; the naughty girl awoke in her at once, driving her to childish defiance. George thought it reckless depravity. He had no idea that it was possible for a rational being to have reached Anne's years, with a conscience far less developed than that of many a school girl.

Irresponsibility he deemed the compensating privilege of idiotcy, but possible

to idiotcy only. He measured the capacity of the soul by the capacity of the intellect; that the two were not necessarily identical had never occurred to him. It was beyond his imagination that Anne, who was by no means deficient in shrewdness or brain-power, should be wanting in soul-sense. To him her naughtinesses were full-fledged crimes; her levity due to a seared, not to an imperfect, conscience. It silenced him, however, even when most incensed. He was silent now.

Anne came forward and dropped into a heap on the hearth-rug, holding out her dainty finger-tips to the warmth she loved. The ruddy light drew threads of living running fire, up and down the shining crown and mantle of her hair; under the kiss of the flame breath, her cheek glowed into damask, her parted lips showed carmine, her eyes like jewels in a magic

cave ; she was a very splendour. George looked at her, and thought as little as she did that she was beautiful.

"Do you know," she said, "I shouldn't wonder much if —" (she hesitated, one glance at George's face decided her for aggravation) "if—Horry—doesn't contrive to find a good part for me, after all. If anything *should* happen to Blanche Seymour, I think I know where he would look for his Aladdin. Can you guess ?"

"Will you kindly tell me of whom and what you are speaking ?" said George, in a suppressed voice that sounded dangerous.

Anne knew perfectly well that she was risking every hope of success, by introducing the subject in such a manner and at such a time. But she was as imprudent in her tempers as in her pleasures.

"I should have thought *you* would have

had a better memory for old friends, George," she said reproachfully. "You ought. There's a text about it somewhere. I can't quite recollect it now; but there *is* one. Of course I am talking about your friend Mr. Timbs. I was saying that I hoped he would find a vacancy for me in the pantomime. It is so long to wait till after that."

He looked at her with fathomless contempt.

"Nevertheless," he said coldly, "it is short to the time that *will* elapse before you enter the doors of a theatre again."

"Why, George? The baby's quite big enough. Oh! George, how unkind you are. When may I go back then? After the New Year? When?"

"Never."

Anne stared, incredulous, read finality in his face, and burst into a weeping fury.

It was disappointment, it was conscience; above all, it was that misery of reaction known fully to the intensely excitable alone—the next morning of the mental inebriate. But it was all so much lost energy. George rose, with a movement of disgust, and left the room, bearing the infant, now again asleep. He went out bent shelteringly over the little head upon his arm, as if to shield it from the clamour of the storm. He laid her, mother-like, in her little cot; then he sat down beside it, and dropping his head on his hands remained thus motionless for nearly an hour. A widower beside his motherless might have sat so, but death could produce nothing so tragic as the attitude within.

CHAPTER V.

A CRISIS.

THE inharmonious hours passed on. Outwardly, Anne was submissive, even demonstratively careful of her husband's little wishes. For some days after Mr. Timbs' visit, (which had not been repeated), she had besieged him with prayers and tears, with anger and coaxing, to reconsider his decision. It was all in vain, and of a sudden she ceased to struggle. Yet she had that passion of vocation which only the greatest strength of principle can sacrifice at the bidding of another. Anne had no such strength. Love might have given

it, or the dutifulness of a noble nature; love she had never known, and she was too slight, too volatile a thing rightly to apprehend even the bare idea of duty.

The natural result followed. She was wild with unsatisfied instinct; she feared him, and she was weak. She took to the last refuge of the weak—deception. One morning, sauntering about the streets, she met Mr. Timbs. He was on his way to rehearsal, and invited her to accompany him, nominally to see the improvements lately made in the theatre. She saw through the excuse enough to hesitate, and enough to succumb. Since then she had attended daily, not professedly as an understudy, but still qualifying herself for any possible emergency.

From a professional point of view she learned a great deal during these weeks. Mr. Timbs, a clever actor himself, though

without genius, was even better as a teacher than as an artist. Thoroughly versed in the rules and grammar of his art, he was a really admirable trainer, and he set himself to train Anne in his best style; for he saw in her that divine spark to which he made no claim himself, but which he could afford to recognize, without envy or detraction, in a very beautiful and sprightly young woman who, though she might owe her genius to nature, would owe all her art-education to himself.

Anne looked, listened, and learned, caught at every hint, and made progress at a rate scarcely suspected either by her teacher or herself; for she took no active part at rehearsals, and her moments of private practice were apt to be agitated by sudden alarms, either of the return of George himself, or of interruption by some possible traitor. Among these last the

landlady and the very limited *personnel* of her establishment were not to be reckoned. The lodgings had been theatrical lodgings from time immemorial; traditional sympathies were all with Anne, and the flavour of conspiracy about the matter was rather an attraction than otherwise to the open-faced motherly-looking widow, whose comfortable florid matronliness had been one of the chief reasons why George did not change his quarters on his conversion. He thought she would be such a help and comfort to Anne. So she was; but not quite in the way he had meant.

For one thing, she undertook to be responsible for the baby in the mornings, during Anne's attendance at the theatre. In spite of her motherly appearance, however, this was not a marked success. The child grew languid and fretful. George, to whom its every development was far

more interesting than to its mother, became anxious about it. He wanted to have a doctor, distrusting Anne's explanation of teething. It should be said that she gave the explanation in good faith; her ignorance was such that she would herself have accepted the reason as valid in the case of an infant far younger than hers. She had never cared for babies, never taken interest in those of other people, never followed and compared, with a mysterious delight, the little chronicle of their triumphs—the first tooth, the first step, the first word. She loved her own baby, for she was anything but unnatural. But if she had loved it much more unselfishly and devotedly than she did, her affection would scarcely have supplied the place of knowledge. George, who underrated even the amount of affection she really had for the child, set no value on

her opinion, and merely felt an added bitterness at her freedom from anxiety. But when the landlady, to whom he appealed, also laughed all fears to scorn, though with a proper contempt for Anne's theory, he was content; and, in fact, not long after, little Tessa began to revive.

This was about Christmas time. On Boxing-night the theatre was re-opened with the pantomime, and Anne's mornings out were stopped for a while. The pantomime was a triumph from the first. Mr. Timbs was modestly delighted; Anne was enthusiastic in her congratulations. She managed to come across him so as to offer them; it was understood that George did not care to keep up the acquaintance, so that his old friend came no more to the house. Anne lamented her lord's perversity, but agreed that it must be respected, at least to that extent; for

she made it no secret from him that *she* was keeping up acquaintance with "Mr. Charles," or that she found it a pleasant one. The one secret she did keep for her life was her flirtation with the theatre; that with the manager, such as it was, she was at no pains to hide, except so far as it might involve the discovery of the other.

Flirt she did, no doubt, in a certain way; she would have done the same under her husband's very eyes, and perhaps with more vigour, because with more zest. Sentiment may appreciate a flavour of the clandestine in its indulgence; but there was no sentiment about Anne, and far from rejoicing in secresy it was a weariness unspeakable to her.

Nothing but an uncontrollable passion, which could be gratified in no other way, could have driven her to concealment—

she, whose heart was for ever at the tip of her tongue. Such a passion for her art she had, and for that alone. Mr. Timbs helped her, and she was grateful. He understood her; but so did her landlady, so did Emma Barratt. His sympathy was not unique enough to be dangerous, to a nature which was always ready to be hail-fellow-well-met with all the world, and had seldom found the world unresponsive; in fact, his insouciance, his genuine want of sentiment, was largely what commended him to Anne. A suspicion of earnestness, a hint of warmth, would have repelled her. Had he, or any one else, ventured to try, Mrs. George Paton would assuredly have boxed his ears for him in earnest, and renounced his acquaintance unhesitatingly and without a regret. To be unloving to her husband, provoking, unsympathetic, dis-

obedient, all this was nothing in her estimation. But further than that she would not go. The possibility of such a thing did not enter her head. Her virtue was altogether unaccompanied by the graces —delicacy, refinement, discretion—mere virtue unadorned, and by no means thus adorned the most. But such as it was, it was robust, though more the result of instinct than principle; scarcely more, perhaps, than one outcome of her supreme healthiness of body and mind, to which morbid impulses were unknown.

She had not a very lively Christmas. George brought one or two waifs and strays from city offices, to share the dinner and spend the day. They were exceedingly young men; it was stretching a point to call them men at all. They were very mild and very shy. Anne tried to draw them out, but without success; it

was a question whether they were more afraid of her or of their host. Rather than have no conversation, she moderated the coruscations of her intellect, and assumed a style skilfully compounded of Hester and Mrs. Stephens. It was an admirable study, from an artistic point of view; and practically it answered very well. The mild young men came out under it, like colours removed from the trying glare of electric light to the gentle radiance of candles. But she did not find it very amusing, after all; partly because the style, in itself, fatigued her unutterably, partly because she felt that George suspected the genuineness of the performance and failed to appreciate it. A joke of this kind particularly requires an accomplice, if it is not to become a very dismal penance indeed. On the whole, by the time the visitors took their leave (which they did

with more reluctance than she had at all wished to inspire) Anne felt very weary, and rather out of spirits. Life seemed very neutral-tinted indeed.

It continued to be so, for some time. Except for the one interview mentioned above, she saw nothing of Mr. Timbs; the world of her desires and interests seemed to be closed to her again. Emma Barratt she saw occasionally. But there was not much pleasure in the interviews, for Emma's temper now was chronically short. Anne, who had had little temptation to professional jealousy in her favoured career, did not thoroughly understand the change. But she was not a person to put up with whims of temper. She treated Emma at least as cavalierly as Emma treated her; so that at last they met fewer times in a week, than they had once met during a day.

This, at least, ought to have pleased George. Unfortunately, by this time, he had entered upon relations with his wife, which were little better than a permanent armed neutrality. This is a fatiguing and quite un-ideal relationship, in which to stand towards the partner of your life. George felt it to be so; it is probable, therefore, that neither he nor Anne were any more sorry than they appeared to be when, in the early part of the New Year, business of his employer's took him up to London.

In the amiability of exceeding content, Anne had actually accompanied him to the coach and seen him off. They parted quite on affectionate terms. George himself felt something of the geniality born of relief, though he felt it with the drawback of prickings of conscience which were quite unknown to Anne. To be frank, her satisfaction was absolutely unalloyed. As she

went back, through the pleasant morning bustle of the streets, her heart beat with the measure of a schoolboy's on the first day of the holidays. It was holiday time for her. She was not quite clear what she should do with it; she formed no very definite plans of enjoyment. The essence of all enjoyment lay in the mere fact: she was free.

George expected to be away for about a fortnight, and for nearly half that time Anne enjoyed this abstract sense of liberty without making any noteworthy use of her freedom. George had been too proud, rather than too confiding, to hedge about the hours of his absence with precautionary injunctions. Thereby, with a wisdom beyond his meaning, he did more to ensure good behaviour than could have been effected by the most minute and far-seeing code. Finding nothing very specially for-

bidden, Anne found nothing irresistibly desirable.

She was in the full enjoyment of this state of easy virtue when a paragraph in the local paper, read one morning over her comfortably late breakfast, came to quicken her breath, to brighten her eye, to put an extra buoyancy into her dancing feet. It sent the quick colour to her face with every step on the stair, set her breaking out into snatches of song, posed her now and again in dramatic attitudes of perfect grace.

It was in one of these that Emma Barratt surprised her when, an hour or two later, she came in. Miss Barratt had been despatched on this errand much earlier; but she was no winged messenger. Even the refinements of wheedling, and the heavy bribe in the shape of professional advancement, which Mr. Timbs had lavished recklessly upon her, could not

send her on his bidding with a swift step or a bright face. He had hesitated long as to coming himself, but had yielded at last to a fear of frightening Anne by a visit that must be, in a measure, clandestine.

Anne, caught in a fine attitude of command, stood fixed in it a moment, her whole face a question, quite forgetful of the ordinary forms of civility. Emma, on her part, wasted no time on these preliminaries.

"Oh!" she began, with a suppressed snort; "so you've heard."

Anne coloured slightly, and dropped her arm.

"I have heard nothing. I saw in the paper about poor Blanche's accident, last night—if that is what you mean. How is she? The account said it was serious."

"Oh! you may make your mind easy," said Emma, grimly. "She's not dying;

but, being laid up with a compound fracture, she's quite ill enough to suit your purpose."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Anne, crimson this time.

"Folks as asks no questions won't be told no lies."

Anne began a reply in her most florid style. This phase and its consequences were well known to Emma. She bethought herself of the promised reward, of the danger of losing it, if Anne's temper should overcome her desires to the extent of making her reject Mr. Timbs's proposal; and she changed her tone.

"Come, now—there's nothing to flare up about. Why should you play Miss Innocence with me? It's not necessary at this time of day. Perhaps we haven't been quite such good friends of late; but I make no complaints, and if you're

willing to let by-gones be by-gones, you needn't fear I shall bear a grudge. Bless you, I'm not jealous!" she exclaimed, with a shrilly laugh. "Do you think I would be such a ninny as to take 'Aladdin,' if it was offered me? Not if he was to go down on his knees to me to do it! I hope I know my style better than that."

"Oh! it's not much of a part, any way," said Anne, with studied indifference.

"So I think," returned Emma, with equal sincerity. "But now the murder's out. Good or bad, Mr. Timbs has sent me to ask if you will take it, now Blanche is laid up?"

Anne's eyes flashed triumph, but she feigned consideration. The ambassador's sorely-tried temper began to chafe anew.

"Rehearsal's at eleven sharp," she said, rising abruptly. "I suppose I may say it is all right?" Then, as Anne still coquetted

with her bliss, Emma broke into shouting laughter.

"What's the matter?" asked Anne, suspiciously.

"Oh! nothing. Well, I suppose you'll fly into a rage again, if I tell you. It was only to think how little call there was for all the coaxing and teasing, and begging and praying, that I was to be sure to use to get you to come. Well, I believe Mr. Timbs is more afraid of your dear George than you are!"

She had expected an outburst, but it did not come.

"Oh! George is away," said Anne, naïvely.

This time Emma did not laugh; she fairly stared. The simplicity of this revelation at once enlightened and bewildered her. Ultimately she whistled.

"So?" she said. "But I suppose he

is not gone for good. And you can't expect *any* manager to take you on, say for a week, to have the same trouble, all over again, at the end of it."

"Mr. Timbs will take me."

"Well! and what will you do when the master comes home?"

Anne looked at her a moment.

"I don't know," she said doggedly, on a little sigh.

"What do you suppose he'll say when he finds out?

"I don't know," she said again. She paused; then—"I don't suppose he'll *say* much at all. Perhaps"—she gave a little laugh and a little shiver—"perhaps he'll murder me."

It was absurd, but Emma felt a little shivery too. It was a jest, of course; but there was a touch of earnestness about the girl's tone, and in her dilated

eyes, that belied the laugh and took off from the exaggeration.

Before Emma could decide how to take it, Anne had sprung to her feet. She threw out her arms, as if throwing off a weight of indecision.

"Perhaps he may," she said rapidly. "But I can't help it; if it must be, it must. It will have been worth while. Oh!" she said, with a long sigh, "I can't tell you how I feel this. To have the boards under my feet again; to have the lights and the music and the faces —all of them in touch with me, and I with them, till it is like a sort of life running to and fro, between us, mine into them and theirs into me—to know myself able to play upon them, to turn them as I please! Why, Emma, that alone would be worth calling life! But there is more than that. Think: to-day,

now, I may be a poor dull girl, the wife of a respectable (oh! *such* a respectable) merchant's clerk. To-day everything may be small and mean, and more uninteresting than I thought it possible for existence to be—so uninteresting that my very heart gets *numb* with dulness. But to-night I shall feel: curiosity, terror, amazement, rapture, love, power—I shall taste them all. To-night I shall be raised from a gutter to a throne; I shall be a prince; the mightiest spirits will be at my beck and call; I shall only need to speak to have everything the world can give; I shall revel in splendour——"

She broke off with a long breath of satisfaction.

"Cardboard, and tinsel, and paste diamonds. Bah!" cried Emma, impatiently. "What nonsense!"

"Isn't it?" laughed Anne. A moment

before she had been speaking with an approach to passion; now, she spoke quite in her ordinary tone, with no trace of resentment at Emma's undisguised contempt. "But it is very nice nonsense, at the right time, you know."

"Do you mean to tell me you think it real, when you are on the stage?"

"Yes. That is to say *one* of me does; quite as real as all this, and ever so much more agreeable. I told you the other me was keeping an eye on the audience. That is just the beauty of it; I get two people's enjoyment rolled into one."

"Oh! tell your grandmother," said Emma, indignantly, as she took herself off. But that good old lady would not have understood.

Great expectations are often perilous to indulge in, but on this occasion Anne's

were justified. Even Mr. Timbs was amazed. It seemed as though these months of repression had intensified her natural powers, as much as his instruction had improved her artistic ones. It was only a pantomime character—a part in which the comparative absence of bad jokes, conceded to the hero after his elevation, resulted only in a blanker weakness of diction. But Anne created it. She did not make her Aladdin a romantic hero out of place; he was still the *jeune premier* of pantomime, but idealized by a genius thrown away on such a part.

Not that Anne thought herself thrown away. To her were granted two nights of absolutely perfect enjoyment. One night, when her heart leaped up at the mere fact of return; when she came back to the stage, as an exile to his

fatherland, as a swallow, home-sick for summer, to the south. The other, when all the pleasantest accessories of her profession came to lend their attractions to that return; when she was deafened with applause, giddy with the incense of flattery; when her spirits and her beauty, rising and glowing more and more in this congenial atmosphere, redoubled the expressions of admiration which had called them forth.

The third night came back to her, in bad dreams, for years. Again she would see the lights, the crowd of admiring faces, the tawdry but effective splendours of the stage, the glitter of jewels and armour, the gay grouping of bright-tinted flimsy tissues. Again she would hear the thunder of applause, nearly drowning the merry trivial music; would stand, smiling and bowing over the tribu-

tary flowers, as the curtain fell on her last scene. And after that, a black confusion of horror.

She came off the stage laughing, dancing, wild with excitement; and she was aware all at once of a sort of awe-struck, pitying flutter about her. The little crowd of fantastic figures gave way before a messenger who, pale, breathless, tear-stained, shawl and bonnet awry, was a very embodiment of haste and dismay.

"Oh! ma'am," she panted, with sobs, "I thought you was never coming."

A cold mist seemed to steal up about Anne, withdrawing her from the mirth and life around into an awful solitude. She held out her hand mechanically for a scrap of paper thrust towards her. She opened it and read. This was what she read—

"I think you had better come home. Your child is dying. GEORGE."

She did not weep nor faint; only she went white with a whiteness that no cosmetics could disguise, and stood as if stunned. Then she looked round helplessly, and made a little murmur for her cloak. The flowers and the paper had fallen rustling together at her feet. Emma Barratt picked it up, read it, and tossed it to the company in general with a brief commentary—"Brute!" Then she took Anne away from the officious crowd into the dressing-room, and kissed her; and she and the weeping maid-of-all-work, between them, helped her off with Aladdin's finery—the peach colour and the tinsel—and into her old grey gown; and twisted up her hair somehow under her bonnet, and muffled her up, and got her ready.

"I won't keep you now, of course," said Emma, as she put in the last pin

with a parting kiss; "but if you think it will be any good, I'll come along as soon as I'm dressed."

She did not make the offer with any great enthusiasm, and seemed relieved when Anne mutely declined. Anne had not spoken, not even asked a question about this dreadful thing that had come upon her. Emma's pitying, and the other girls' sobs, between them, had brought a few slow tears into her eyes and down her cheeks. But she was unnaturally quiet, and seemed in a bewilderment of terror.

Emma went back to her curious and sympathetic companions. Now that the mother was gone, she did not disguise her real opinion of the state of the child.

"No," she said; "I don't think there is much chance for the poor little beggar. From what I can make out it seems to

have been poisoned—given something in mistake for soothing syrup. It's an affair *I'm* glad to be out of, I must say."

A silent, stumbling walk, through dark sloshy streets, and Anne stood again before the door she had closed behind her, in such triumph and exultation, four hours ago. On the threshold her strength seemed to give way; she hung on her companion, with something of the dead weight of unconsciousness. Some one opened the door; she had an impression of light, such as a blindfolded person may have—an impression without perception. There were voices; frightened, voluble, exculpatory, recriminative speech. She heard as she saw, without comprehension. And then a door opened above, and suddenly, striking all other utterances into silence, came a sharp agonized wail, that pierced through her heart into her brain.

"My baby! oh, my baby!" she cried, as she ran.

The room seemed full of people—silent people mostly, but who would break into a sob now and then, or an ejaculation. These seemed to Anne to be something beside the mark altogether, part of the general disorder of the room, in which things had all been pulled about—jugs, cups, basins, candlesticks, standing confusedly on chairs or on the floor. The only place that entered into her understanding was the bed, from which moan after moan went up in a ceaseless miserable monotony, broken only now and then by the shriek which she had heard below. The only persons, those who stood by the bedside—her husband and the doctor.

She came on slowly, fascinated with dread. The doctor saw her, and turned from his useless watch with some utter-

ance, conventional, meaningless, as words must be at such a crisis. George saw her, and turned upon her a face which rooted her to the spot with terror.

"Murderess!" he said, "look there!"

"Dear sir—remember—in such a presence——"

The doctor stammered into silence. He was young, and he was frightened.

Anne crept mechanically nearer; her eyes never left her husband; she seemed to move but at the bidding of his look. She came up to the bed; the doctor stepped aside. She followed George's eyes, and shrank together with a little moan. The piteous, convulsed face; the glazing, half-shut eyes; the purple lips on which a little froth had gathered—this was not her baby, this awful thing was death; and Anne had never looked on death before.

Now she stood looking upon it, and did not dare to turn away. The room got very still, while the husband and wife stood looking together at their dying child. At last the moans grew fainter. The child opened its eyes; it seemed to know its mother. Anne's hair had fallen loose; now the baby's eyes seemed attracted by the glitter of its favourite plaything. It moved one little hand.

"Take her," said George.

Then the extremity of terror gave Anne words.

"Oh, George," she said, "she is—dying!"

He raised his arm in a mute, passionate appeal to heaven and earth, witnesses of her unnaturalness. Anne screamed.

"Don't strike me, George! I—I'll take her."

She did. For a few moments she stood

like a statue, the child in her arms, her lips parted, her eyes dilated with horror. The baby fingers feebly sought her hair; clutched it, lingered there, stiffened there. Anne felt a little shudder, a straightening out of limbs, then a relaxing.

The same moment, without a word or cry, she fell prone, as white, and seemingly as lifeless, as the little corpse which lay beside her, half hidden by her hair.

CHAPTER VI.

DISGRACED.

No one knew how, or where, George passed that night. He had departed unnoticed, in the confusion consequent on Anne's fall; he came back just as the late daybreak was lividly whitening the sky—wet, mud-stained and haggard, but composed. However wild the storm of rage and grief to which the rocks and woods had alone been witness, it was over now. He made all needful arrangements in a business-like manner; he went to the room where the poor little baby lay, and stood for some minutes by the bed, but

the sight seemed to arouse none of the emotions of last night. After a little while he turned away and left the room, sitting down quietly to write to his employers, explaining the circumstances which would prevent his return to the office for a few days. When he had sealed the letter and given it to the landlady, he asked after his wife. Of course it did not escape unfavourable notice that he had not done so before, or that he should have needed to ask at all. The woman was too much alarmed at her share in the catastrophe to answer sharply; she only whimpered out that the poor dear was asleep, and had better not be disturbed.

"Of course not," said George; and almost immediately he left the house again.

He was not by when Anne awoke out of an opiate-induced slumber—first to be-

wilderment, then to recollection. Therewith set in a state that greatly puzzled her attendant. The landlady she would not allow to come near her; but a mixture of genuine kindliness and of a popular love of tragedies had brought Emma Barratt over early to her assistance, and Emma could not make her out at all. She lay in bed all day, almost motionless, neither eating, speaking, nor weeping; not unconscious, rather, it seemed, in a state of intense nervous tension, but absolutely silent and unresponsive. Emma got frightened at last, and tried to rouse her, to break her down, but nothing succeeded.

She stayed till late in the afternoon, and all that time George never came near them. Now and then they heard his footsteps, or his cold voice, in the passage or on the stairs; and each time Anne trembled from head to foot, and the scared

look deepened in her eyes. Of course all this excited Emma's curiosity to the highest pitch, but she had to leave unsatisfied.

Emma had little imagination; she was practical, and had an extensive acquaintance with useful facts. Consequently, though it was plain enough that Anne was frightened, Emma could never have guessed the cause of her terror: that she fully believed she had made herself amenable to the extreme sentence of the law. "Murderess!" George had called her. It was the last word he had spoken. All that day, as she crouched, fascinated with terror, among the pillows, she was quite prepared to see him enter—avenger of blood—with the ministers of justice at his heels. She had all the popular dread of the law, and much more than the popular ignorance of its powers. For

months past, moreover, she had been cultivating professionally a naturally picturesque and powerful imagination; and her nerves had scarcely recovered a shock severe enough to have tried less artistically sensitive ones than hers.

So it happened that when, at last, towards nightfall, George did come in, she shut her eyes and cowered beneath the coverings, awaiting doom. He only made a few cold inquiries after her health and her requirements. Anne's courage revived at this; she looked up, and answered meekly and almost deprecatingly. Then he stood a few minutes in an awkward silence. At last he said—

"The inquest will be held to-morrow, at two o'clock, at the Lamb and Flag. The funeral I have arranged for the following morning, at eleven. Perhaps Miss Barratt will help you pack up, in the course of

to-morrow, so that we shall not need to return here afterwards, but can go at once to the lodgings I have engaged."

"The inquest?" Anne had heard nothing else. "And I must go?"

"Of course; the doctor assures me there is nothing to prevent it." His coldness took on a tone of bitterness. "I trust, Anne," he went on, "that you will make an effort to control yourself, for that short time, at least. One need not make a scandal, because one has committed a crime."

"I didn't! oh, I didn't! I never gave it to her on purpose, George. Mrs. Wright used always to keep the bottle in that particular place—how was I to know she had changed it? It was nearly dark—there was only the fire. Oh, my darling baby that I loved! Could I have meant to hurt her? Oh! George, try to believe me! oh! do, do!"

He answered nothing; only set his teeth tight, as he felt his hard-won self-control escaping from him. He turned away.

"Oh! George, *save me!*" she shrieked; there was the ring of despair in her voice. He looked round.

"Save you!" he flung the words at her across his shoulder, "from what?"

"Don't let them—" she moaned and shuddered, "don't let them—hang me!"

He stared at her, bewildered. It took him a moment or two to realize what her fear was. When he did he turned upon her, fiercely rather than in compassion.

"Save you!" he repeated. "Your life is in no danger, if that is what you are afraid of; the law can't touch you. Comfort yourself, by all means; you are only guilty morally."

"Is that all?"

"That's all," laughed George.

She looked an anxious moment in his eyes, as though not yet daring to believe. Then the frozen bonds of terror which had held her all day, paralysing tears and speech and even thought, broke all at once. A rush of colour came over the snowy whiteness of her face ; with one sob the fountains of expression were unsealed. She wept, she sobbed, she called upon her baby, she recalled its perfections, exhausted herself in terms of endearment, then broke into renewed sobbing. She wept herself weary ; wept herself first into a feeling of relief, then, more bitterly, into a sense of dreariness and desolation, for she wept alone. With his last words George had turned on his heel and left the room ; by the time he came back she had cried herself to sleep. He watched her for a while ; she lay, flushed with tears and sleep, her golden hair all abroad upon the

pillows; once and again she half drifted back to consciousness on the wave of a long sobbing sigh, but youth and nature were merciful to her and she slept on.

For all her grief she was a picture of life and health and beauty; even in her sleep her intense animal vitality impressed itself on him. And in the next room, cold and dead, the traces of agony imprinted still upon its poor little face and clenched hands, lay all that she had left him of his child; the child in whom, for a few brief weeks, he had vainly dreamed to find a bond of union with its mother; to whom, as that hope faded, he had looked for fulfilling to him some day his never yet satisfied craving for a home. George had been father and mother to the child; he had lavished on her all the passion and tenderness of which he was capable. And already she knew him well; she would

struggle towards him from her very mother's arms. She, at least, had jubilant welcomes for him; she had caressing touches, pretty inarticulate confidences, sweet surrenderings, as she yielded herself to sleep upon his shoulder, the last look of the heavy-lidded eyes a drowsy smile into his face. It was not wise of George to stand above his blooming, breathing wife, who had never been his in heart, casting these contrasts over in his mind—these, and other matters which did not tend to incline him to mercy.

He thought that the worst had come, that no more hopeless severance could be made between them two. But he was mistaken. That night the breach might still have been repaired; that night, if he had willed, if he could have believed, their far-estranged hearts might have been drawn together as they had never been before;

not, perhaps, permanently, but for long enough to lay the foundations of at least mutual understanding in the future. He did not believe it; he had not the love which alone could make such faith possible; the most he could do, just then, was to hold his heart back from hate. So the advance to which Anne would then have been ready to respond was not made; the forgiveness for which, then, she would have kissed his feet, was not offered. Four-and-twenty hours later it had become too late for her, even if it had been possible for him.

Four-and-twenty hours later Anne had been taught to see matters in quite a different light. The pity which her husband denied her had been lavished upon her, in many flattering ways, by mere strangers and acquaintances; and every such expression of sympathy was a

reproach to him, a reproach which she was already prepared rather to endorse than to resent. In the morning came Mr. Timbs, humble, remorseful, stricken in as much conscience as he possessed. He was quite ready, and even eager, to take all the blame of the catastrophe; besought her to absolve herself, and then sat helpless, his face describing all the abject misery which nature had formed it to express, till Anne felt comforted by the mere sight of his affliction. George would not look sorry.

At the inquest it was much the same. The coroner, and the coroner's jury, had been more than considerate of her feelings. Some of the jurors had witnessed her triumph at the theatre, on the very night that had such an awful ending; her account of that evening, given with dramatic simplicity, amid tears and self-reproach, touched them exceedingly.

George, in a white heat of rage and disgust at the false impression that she managed to convey, yet could but hold his peace. Above all things else he dreaded a scandal. But he was very wroth. That she should get pitied for the accidental result of her glaring disobedience was bad enough ; that she should be pitied, also, for being obliged to follow a profession so inconsistent with her maternal duties was altogether intolerable. The injustice to himself, involved in this point of view, hardened his heart against her yet more. Of course, all this finally upset Anne's inadequate moral sense. She left the room with a feeling that penitence was not at all the sentiment appropriate to the occasion ; beginning to pity herself with double intensity now that it had been pointed out to her how much she really was to be pitied.

She made not the slightest effort to restrain her tears—excitement, fatigue, nervousness, all helped their flow. George's sternness simply made her hysterical. Eventually, she had to be taken into one of the private sitting-rooms of the inn, with every woman in the establishment to fuss over her and try to make George feel like a brute. Finding himself worse than useless, he retired to pace up and down the street till such time as she could be moved; a growing bitterness in his heart, a kindling fire in his brain.

It was a dreary new beginning the husband and wife made, on the rainy February afternoon after the funeral; new with a horrible raw newness, like the earth on a fresh-made grave, and with a grave, too, lying between them—a great gulf already, and to widen more and more.

Physical discomforts were not wanting, of course; they never are on such occasions. The fire in the little-used grate would only smoulder and smoke, chokingly, miserably; the key of the trunk containing some of the things most needful for their convenience broke off in the lock, and it was too late to get a workman that day—things which, to people in good temper and spirits, would have been a joke, but each of which seemed little short of a calamity to Anne, a fresh article in the indictment against her husband. He showed no impatience, no sympathy; through everything he bore himself with the indifference of one to whom nothing can ever matter much again. Anne grew angry at the tacit reproach. She paraded her grievances all the more for his reticence, and talked at him the more, the less he would answer. It was little wonder

if he thought her heartless; she knew he thought so, and, rebelling against the injustice, did her best to confirm him in his belief. And all the while her heart was aching for her baby; yet she was so inexperienced in bereavement, that she herself scarcely recognized her feeling as sorrow.

At last, after a miserable pretence at a meal, at which neither could eat, Anne flung out of the room in tears, laying the blame of her inability on the food, and thus back on George; accusing him of having brought her there to kill her; and hoping that when he saw her in the cemetery, beside darling baby, he would be satisfied. If he had been deaf, he could not have appeared more unconcerned. When she had gone, he sat on still where she had left him. His attitude was despondent, but it was not despondency that

filled his soul. Surging within him was a tempest of actual hatred. He sat there quite still, and felt hot murderous thrills run like fire through his veins; his half-closed hands clenched tighter; he made no effort any more; he sought no relief in word or movement. The southern madness, that was in his blood, blazed and revelled unchecked.

Upon this mood, Anne came back again. It was the mere restlessness of grief that brought her back; silence and solitude had no such healing balms for her, as more self-contained natures find in them. She sat down opposite George, and tried to attract his attention. When she found that sighs and restlessness left him, not so much unmoved, as absolutely unperceiving, she burst into angry sobs.

"I think it is very hard, when I am in such trouble, that everybody in the whole

world should be kinder to me than my own husband. Even the gentlemen at that dreadful inquest were sorry for me—had a kind word for me. But you—oh, you'll be sorry some day, when your poor wife is gone, to remember what was the best word *you* had for her in her sorrow!"

George let his hand drop from before his face, and said—

"You are pleased to forget that those sympathetic gentlemen were not in possession of the facts of the case."

"Now you want to make out that I told them lies. But, of course, there was nothing else to be expected of the man who thinks his wife——"

"Will you have it, then?" he cried. "Yes, a murderess! The law may acquit you, society may pity you, your tempters and your dupes may conspire to drug your conscience; but leave me, as I would be

left, to silence; for, if you force me to speak, there are no smooth words to be hoped for from me."

"You know it was an accident; you might have done it yourself."

"An accident! That you gave her the dose that killed her—yes! And what about the weeks during which you have secretly defied and disobeyed me? the evenings of hypocritical tenderness, meant to blind me to the mornings of heartless neglect? to the hours at which I was never to guess, when my child lay, drugged to silence, or wailing her heart out unheeded, while her mother laughed and danced and sang, in the congenial company of mountebanks and buffoons? Think of it—her mother! Perhaps, after all, it is well for her that she is dead."

Anne sprang to her feet.

"Yes," she cried, wildly, "I am glad

she died! Because if she had grown up what you would have had her—a little canting prig, like a child in a tract, that turns up its large blue eyes at its mother's iniquities, and, when cant won't do any good, goes into a decline on purpose to aggravate—I think I should have killed her then. Yes, if it was to do again——"

She got no further, because he struck her. He did not strike lightly; his mind leapt outward with his arm on a dumb cry, little other than that of the prophet of old, "Would that there were a sword in my hand that I might kill thee!" But happily Anne saw it coming, in time to avoid the full force of the blow; it was beneath the shock, as much as beneath the stroke, that she dropped helplessly upon the floor, where she cowered, a moaning heap.

For some seconds neither of them stirred

nor spoke; then she raised her bowed head from her trembling hands, and looked up. Upon her white face was an angry scarlet mark, and, when she dazedly put back the blinding hair from before her eyes, a little thread of crimson trickled down upon her hands; near the temple, the blow had broken the skin. She started to feel her fingers wet, looked at him, flushed a little, and held them mutely up to him,—dumb, but for her appealing eyes.

Therewith came upon him so sickening a sense of shame, that his very heart seemed to stand still within him; he felt physically faint and giddy, with the sudden unutterable loathing of himself. It was not remorse he felt; there came no startled awakening of dead love—between those two, love had never been born. The wound was all to his own manhood. Humiliated beyond the power of speech, even the

stammering prayer for pardon, he knelt down beside her, supporting her head upon his breast as he tried to staunch the blood. In truth, it was not a difficult task; the injury was not serious, and very soon Anne so far recovered herself as to begin to cry.

"Oh, George, how could you?" she sobbed; and he was in no condition to notice how amazingly little serious resentment there was in her tone. Still he could find no words; but when, surprised at his silence, she disengaged herself, so as to look at his face, she was startled.

"Never mind," she said magnanimously, through her tears; "you needn't take on about it so much as all that. I'm not much hurt, I think. They do say that hurts to the head are often felt more afterwards. But perhaps those are a different kind; I dare say they may be. Anyhow I forgive you, George."

She had got to her feet, a little dizzily, but easily enough to be reassuring. George rose too, and stood apart.

"Teach me, if you can, to forgive myself," he said hoarsely, "or else spare me your forgiveness, which can only add to the load of my humiliation."

Anne had nothing to say to this. She sat down and sobbed on a little, in a forlorn, hysterical sort of way. She felt very desolate; this shame, which was too deep for words, was beyond her understanding. She wanted comfort, not this estranging contrition.

"You might kiss me, George," she wailed reproachfully.

His amazement equalled hers. But it was not for him to decline any prescribed penance. He sat down dutifully beside her, and kissed her—such a kiss! The rosy, piteous lips of this daughter of the

people were framed for other touches than this cold respectful salute, which he tried hard not to make reluctant. It did not, even then, occur to him, what tenderness might have done for them both. The thought could have brought little but despair, for he had none to give.

CHAPTER VII.

DEVELOPMENTS.

The after consequences of that scene were peculiar. It was the beginning of quite a new era in their relations. From that evening, George left his wife alone. He showed no more interest in her. Affection he had never shown, but now he never expressed a wish or an objection; he issued neither commands nor prohibitions. It was not indifference, it was aversion. The sight of her had become a standing memorial, at once of his wrongs and of hers; and he would have more readily forgiven her for the loss of the child, and

all that had led to that loss, than he could for having driven him, for one moment, to forget his manhood.

And as he withdrew more and more into himself, Anne began to advance; as he fled, she followed. Anne Paton still spoke fairly grammatical English, with a pure accent and correct aspirates; she still showed something of the old training, in little details of habits and manners. But all other traditions of her past seemed to have fallen off from her, as easily as the larva skin falls from the May fly. It was marvellous how soon, and how completely, she had been born into Bohemia. A little struggle, a brief repugnance, a little wrenching of acquired tastes, and the work was done. One generation of culture could not eradicate from that vigorous organization the strain of populace to which it owed all its vigour. Already the

very memory of the old life, its complexion and its conditions, was becoming faint as the intimations of immortality. Now, it is scarcely too much to say that she really liked George better, after that episode, than she had ever done before. That one brutally unmistakable outburst of expression seemed to have brought him more within the range of her comprehension, therefore more within her sympathies. She owed him no grudge; to her astoundingly primitive instincts it scarcely seemed that he had gone beyond his rights. She was centuries before the age of chivalry in her mental status; she held, unformulated, the unformulated faith of the people: that the power of the fist in the one sex is the natural protection against the power of the tongue in the other. There had proved to be a point beyond which she might not go unpunished, and she rather

respected him for the convincing character of the assertion. At the time when he felt that she had disgraced him for ever in his own eyes, he was actually becoming more attractive in hers.

Now, too, she was softened to an unusual extent. Such an untroubled life had hers been, that the loss of her child was really the first sorrow she had ever known. Hers was not a nature that any loss or trouble could permanently affect. But, while the effect lasted, it was a favourable one. Between the remnants of her grief and the sudden development of her respect, Anne became wonderfully virtuous in those days.

It is true, circumstances assisted her good resolutions. After the calamitous ending of his experiment, Mr. Timbs felt no inclination to make any more professional overtures to her; in consequence,

he practically dropped out of the list of her acquaintance. Late events had naturally not tended to soften George's heart towards him, and Mr. Timbs had seen enough of him in the old days to have learned the lesson which Anne had just perceived — that there were moods in which he might not be provoked, without a reckless disregard of personal safety. And Horatio was not one of those men whom danger instantly stimulates to absurdities. To do him justice also, he had too much kindness of heart to expose Anne to comment abroad, and misery at home, by attentions, however innocent, which could offer no greater attraction to himself than the bodily risk.

Emma Barratt remained fairly faithful to her friend. But Emma scarcely constituted a temptation. For her own reasons, she had never been guilty of

inciting Anne to rebellion, so far as her profession was concerned. Now that she found her a prey to reaction, ready to burn (in theory) all that she had adored, Emma made no attempt to remonstrate with her. She had plenty of conversation, such as it was, and came at first pretty regularly to chat. But Anne, suddenly plunged out of the sunshine, which was her natural condition of being, into the chill, tear-washed shadow of her first grief, was like nothing so much as a drenched butterfly, than which there are few dismaller things in nature. Emma, more ponderously, had as much affinity for sunshine—and that only—as Anne; and after a while she got tired of the gloom. Her visits began to drop off; at last, without any quarrel or confessed breach of their friendship, they seemed to drift apart, and met, when at all, only by chance.

Anne, resentful at first, cherished the hope that Emma's defection would propitiate George. It did nothing of the sort. So far as he was concerned, it had no effect whatever. They drew no nearer. Outwardly, indeed, they became quite a model couple. George's politeness was a match for Anne's humility. He rejected none of her advances; but it was left to her to make them. Still she pursued. On summer evenings, after tea, she would get him to take her for a walk, generally on the Downs. Together they would stand watching the golden sunset over the estuary and behind the hills; would come back together, lover-like, arm-in-arm, through the hawthorn-scented twilight. The chiller evenings found them at their own hearth; George with his paper or his book, Anne with her sewing. But, whether at home or abroad, conversation became

more difficult every day. Anne, to whom silence was penance of the worst, would make a remark—the sillier for the effort to think of something better. George would dutifully take it up; for about five minutes the dialogue would maintain a sort of galvanized life, then it would drop again into a silence which, at last, came to seem less depressing than talk.

It was little better on the few occasions when George would bring a friend to spend the evening. George had not the art, or the luck, of forming equal friendships. The men he brought home with him, from time to time, were generally selected from conscientious motives, as persons in whose friendlessness or general unpopularity he recognized a call to kindness. The friendless ones were young and shy, or else elderly and painfully humble; the unpopular ones seldom failed to

justify their unpopularity. It was all the same to George, in whom duty operated quite independent of love. It was his duty to be kind to a fellow-creature; there was no obligation on him either to like or esteem him, nor did he take much pains to simulate either liking or esteem. To Anne they were an unspeakable infliction. She had no longer spirits to try to fascinate them, or even to bewilder them. She mostly took refuge at the piano—George's gift in the first days of their marriage, when passion had put on the garb of love. She sang the most pathetic of her ballads, and such unimpeachable ditties as bear exclusively on the beauties of nature — relics of her school-days. Her listeners were always delighted; but, in good truth, her voice, sweet and irresistibly expressive as it still was, was only the shadow of what it had

been a few months before. She felt it, and had dropped more than a few tears to what she believed was its memory. In point of fact, it was but hibernating; waiting only for the passing of this dreary winter of her discontent to start into life again.

All the while, George remained unapproachable. Anne was beginning to chafe again; she was, perhaps, on the verge of an outbreak, when there came another check. She became aware of a new hope. After a long, tremulous, secret joy in it, she ventured diffidently to impart it to George, thinking this would ensure her pardon. George looked startled, spoke to her with conventional kindness—and remained as far apart and hopeless as before.

In fact, he could not bring himself to believe that the hope would ever be

brought to a successful accomplishment. "*Write ye this man childless;*" the words had rung in his ears from the first. He did not rebel at the decree, in which he firmly believed, having no suspicion that he was fathering on Providence judgments of his own invention. He did not rebel even at what might have seemed the injustice to himself, because the idea so abundantly satisfied his sense of what was due to Anne. George could forgive Providence for any failure in mercy, but a failure in justice would have tried his faith severely; he was still young enough to expect justice to be poetical, dramatic.

But this last proof of his indifference, as she supposed it, was altogether too much for Anne's barely recovered spirits. She began to droop. Sensitive to all external circumstances, utterly insufficient to herself, seclusion, dulness, and want of

all congenial occupation, began to tell upon her. In an evil hour—by a silence, a shrinking, the cold compassion of a look—she discovered something of George's presentiments. Instantly she adopted them—with variations, for his fears had not been for her. Anne said nothing of her discovery, but she grew nervous, dispirited; had interesting visions of herself as a fair young corpse, strewed her early bier with snowdrops, and planted primroses upon the simple grave, which she watered freely with her own prophetic tears. She took a melancholy pleasure in rehearsing all the details; too often she would spend half an hour at a time, stretched on a couch, with closed eyes and folded palms, imagining the remarks of all the survivors, from George down to the undertaker, unconsciously moulding her features to suit each speech, till she

would have been a perplexing sight to any one who should have come upon her unawares.

Naturally, under this treatment, she drooped more and more. She began to grow very white, very spiritless; her eyes grew large and mournful, seeming to overflow her face, like blue lakes fed with melting snow; her very hair lost something of its rebellious curl, and lay meekly above her brow. In fact, her prophetic instincts seemed in a fair way of ensuring their own fulfilment.

Her old friends said to each other, with indignation, that George Paton was ill-treating his poor young wife; George was not popular in that circle just now. But he was to some extent feared, and none of his critics, or her sympathizers, felt called upon to constitute themselves her defender. As for Anne, she never guessed

their suspicions, any more than they imagined that the vulgar brutality, of which they secretly accused the husband, would have been, by comparison, refreshing elixir to the spirit of the wife.

It was long before George noticed the change in her looks. She did her best to conceal it from him; to pine unnoticed was all in the part; much of the remorse which was lying in wait for him after the catastrophe was to consist in the remembrance of his blindness to the signs by which he might have taken warning. For her own sake, too, she guarded jealously the mournful beauty of the idea; it was the one private pasturage in which her imagination could still rejoice. Paradoxical as it may sound, the pathetic pageant of her death and burial was the only amusement she had at this time; the only outlet for her dramatic instinct.

Repressed in all other directions, it flowed the more freely into this, and she shrank from having the dream brought into the disenchanting light of common day—a subject not for tragedy, but for treatment and prescriptions.

But it was not all pleasure. As she became really weaker and more hysterical, she suffered considerably in her mind. Needless to say that she was superstitious ; even in her strong and sunny days she had a private stock of omens—amateur and otherwise—both for good and evil, in which she practically believed, though theoretically she laughed at them. Now these multiplied, and all pointed one way. Dogs came out of their way to howl beneath her window ; her candles dropped continually into winding-sheets. Waking suddenly in the middle of the night, a sound growing upon her confused senses,

she would rouse George, in an agony of terror, to ask breathlessly if he heard something—a sort of steady ticking. Of course he heard it—out of the pocket at the head of the bed, and he hoped it was steady. She had been too really frightened to feel ashamed at the explanation; as for him, how should it have occurred to him that she had thought it was the death-watch? It was all very well to prognosticate her decease herself, but she did not like these ratifications.

At last the ever-increasing trial to her nerves broke down her reserve. It was an autumn morning, late autumn, sad and sunless, with a cold grey sky that seemed too chill to weep. Anne felt ill and nervous, as indeed she could scarcely have failed to feel, under any circumstances, after the dismal revels in which she had for so long indulged her imagina-

tion. She was holding up George's overcoat for him to put on, (she did this now), when her hands fell from it helplessly, and she burst into tears.

"Why, Anne! Is anything the matter, my dear?" he asked, with his far-off forbearance.

"I don't know," she sobbed. "Oh, George! if I were to die——"

"This is foolishness," he said. "Try and compose yourself; it is neither right nor wise to give way to such morbid and unreasonable ideas."

"I can't help it; it comes over me that everything is nearly over, now, between us two. When it is, George, shall you be a little sorry?"

"Anne, I cannot allow——"

"We have not made each other very happy," she went on unheeding. "It was a mistake—our marriage; but I think

it will soon be put straight now. You'll bury me beside dear baby, won't you, George? and come and look at me now and then?"

"Anne!"

"Dear," she said, leaning her clasped hands upon his breast as she hung upon him, "dear, you must not fret too much; it is better so. We should never have had patience to put this tangle straight; but if it should be cut—— The end is the same; it is sharper, but it is easier and surer too."

"Oh, this is absurd, intolerable! Seriously, Anne, you must not indulge these fancies."

"It is easy to call them fancies," she said, drawing away with some offence. "You have never had them, I daresay."

"Certainly not."

"And you feel no presentiment?"

"Not the very least, except of being

late at the office, which I certainly shall be if you don't let me go at once."

"Go!" she cried, and threw herself on the couch, with averted head.

"It would be better sense on my part if I did," he said, with the restrained manner, which alone, now, proved him annoyed. "But I can scarcely bring myself to leave you so. Come, Anne, make an effort; turn away your mind from these foolish fancies."

She half raised herself, and looked reproach. "Do you think I dwell on them for pleasure?" she said. "Is it so sweet to die young?"

Something moved him then. It was not love; it was scarcely remorse. A touch of pity was in it,—pity for a creature too slight to be taken seriously, whom, even in trying to take her seriously, he had unavoidably wronged. A little sym-

pathy also; the response of the healthy animal in him to her words. He too was young; his life had been none too happy, yet he knew it would not be sweet to die.

In the momentary softening he bent over her and kissed her, and something of his heart went with his lips.

"Good-bye, my poor prophetess," he said, half laughing, as she looked round, feeling that in his touch which had never been there before; "good-bye. 'When we do meet again we'll smile at this.'"

Anne looked startled. Then, with a modulation of infinite pathos, she continued the lines—

"'If not, 'tis true, this parting was well made.'" Then, as she caught a look of some dismay on George's face, her volatile spirits took a turn, uplifted by the joy of a successful retort. She broke into a faint echo of one of her old elfish laughs.

George laughed too, a little awkwardly, and so laughing they parted. He had had but a dim remembrance of his inaccurate quotation, meant chiefly as a condescending concession to her dramatic tastes, and he regretted having given her morbid fancy a seeming advantage. But he was now really pressed for time; in the open air, with the rapid movement making him "feel his life in every limb," the remembrance of his wife did not trouble him much.

"I will ask Dr. Barclay to come and see her," he said to himself, and dismissed the subject from his mind.

George was not observant of his fellow-creatures; now it was chiefly the obstacles which they opposed to his hurrying progress that made him notice how full the streets were that morning. It was the 29th of October, and Sir Charles Wetherall was coming to open the Assizes.

That afternoon Anne got a note to say that, in view of the disturbed state of the town, it had been decided that George should remain, with his chief, in charge of the warehouse in Broad Street. She was not to be alarmed, if he did not even return that night. There was no anticipation of danger; it was merely a prudential measure. He need hardly enjoin upon her to keep indoors till he came back; if she did this, he had every reason to hope that she would escape all annoyance, and every serious alarm, as the mob would have no object of attack which could collect them in that neighbourhood. But, (badly managed though everything seemed to be), he quite hoped to be with her early the next morning, at latest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWENTY-NINTH OF OCTOBER.

Lady Stephens stood looking down the curved sweep of the drive at Ridgelands. The last sounds of the wheels had died away along the road; she had heard the creaking grind and clash of the lodge-gates, as they closed behind the carriage, but still she stood on the steps, leaning against one of the good-natured-looking stone lions. The last night's frost had strewn the drive with beech-leaves, which the gardeners had not yet had time to take away. They rose, swirled, and fell under the fitful gusts

of a rising wind; now and then others would drop, singly or by twos and threes, with a short sibilant rattle. Above, the sky was dull and grey, threatening rain, which yet kept off.

Hester's heart was heavy. Never before, in her happy married life, had she been parted from her husband even for a day; and the circumstances under which he left her now were not reassuring. He was gone to Bristol to attend the Assizes, having to appear as a witness in a case of incendiarism. It had been intended at first that she should accompany him, as she had been used to do in every excursion of business or pleasure; but the news of an attack on the Bishop of Bath and Wells, who had been stoned when returning from consecrating a church at Bedminster, and the consequent swearing in of a hundred special constables, pointed

to a state of things sufficiently stormy to change their plans. That Henry should be going at all under these circumstances was bad enough; that he should be going on that particular business was dreadful. Henry had smiled when the desperate man, one of his own tenants, now awaiting his trial, had sworn to be the death of him yet. But to Hester it was no laughing matter.

Thanks to the feudal system and paternal government, Sir Henry Stephens was by this time the most unpopular landlord in the county. He was a magistrate, too, and the disgust of offenders at his severity was only surpassed by their horror of his eloquence. In fact, Sir Henry could not spare that aggravation of punishment which even the untutored negro felt to be unjust. "Oh, massa!" he remonstrated, "if you floggee, floggee, and if you preachee,

preachee; but don't floggee and preachee too." Sir Henry could never pronounce sentence without preaching too.

He knew he was unpopular, but the knowledge did not affect him unpleasantly. He was rather proud of the fact, considering it as a testimony to the value of his work. There was no misplaced tenderness about him. The case of the incendiary, which was now taking him to Bristol, might have seemed a hard one. Extenuating circumstances of an almost tragic nature might have suggested themselves, to his landlord of all people. Such considerations, if they occurred to him, spoiled neither Henry's sleep nor his breakfast. He made a good one, and went out, satisfied with himself and tolerant of his neighbour.

The case in which he was concerned did not come on that day. But he was

in court, where a ceaseless uproar made the arguments of the learned counsel inaudible. When the court rose, to the sound of three cheers for the king from the unruly audience as they surged out into the street, Sir Henry began to perceive that a disturbance was probable.

Henry had no natural taste for an *émeute;* he was not wanting in personal courage, but he thought such things vulgar. A combat conducted with sticks and brick-bats was not one in which a gentleman could take part without some loss of dignity. On the other hand, the present was such a glorious opportunity for asserting himself on the side of law and order, for rallying, as he expressed it, round the altar and the throne, that he could not resist the temptation of seeing the matter through. It might be that the fates would favour him with the

one chance wanted to make him famous. He had no fear of letting the chance slip.

Consequently he did not make his way straight back to his inn, as he had first thought of doing. He turned his steps towards the Mansion House in Queen's Square, since it was thither that Sir Charles and the mayor, in their respective carriages, were making their way. The streets were crowded; it was difficult to get on. Many of the crowd were, of course, the lowest rabble, the scum that rises to the surface whenever popular temper has come to the boil; men whose usual calling no one could pretend to identify, and whose usual haunts were equally a mystery. But these were not all. The Celtic element was very strong; Irish and Welsh sailors, nationally and professionally eager for a fray on any

pretence whatever. It is not probable that these felt any very genuine interest in the subject of parliamentary reform; but there were others, mechanics and artisans, who no doubt really had the cause at heart. And the professional agitators, (whose well-dressed figures, moving here and there among the throng, seemed to suggest that professional agitation was a calling not unprofitable), had taken care to provide an argument for revolt suited to the meanest capacity. Everyone could appreciate the report that Sir Charles Wetherall had stated publicly, that a labouring man could maintain a large family comfortably on six shillings a week. Altogether it was a dangerous mob; dangerous from its constitution, and yet more from being organized to an extent unusual among mobs.

Sir Henry, partly swept along by the

crowd, partly impelled by curiosity and a certain well-regulated excitement, drifted at last into Queen's Square. He saw Sir Charles's carriage draw up at the door of the Mansion House; saw the shambling, ungainly-looking old gentleman get quickly out, and enter the house with what dignity was possible under the circumstances. The next instant, the carriage lamps were shattered to fragments by the first stony drops of the coming storm. By this time the square was filled with a tossing, vociferating mob; two or three thousand people gathered in front of the Mansion House. The crash of the carriage lamps seemed to have had the effect of the first taste of blood on a tiger—from that moment the riot had begun. At once sticks and stones began to fly against the detested house; now and again, the clink and

shiver of broken glass made itself heard amidst the yells of the rioters. The constables, hampered probably by an uncertainty as to their legal rights which did not trouble their opponents, did their best to restore order, but to little purpose.

Henry, pressed, hustled, and universally ignored, had not yet found that opportunity of distinguishing himself for which he had hoped. But all at once it seemed as if his hour had come. An ill-looking fellow, just in front of him, hurled a stone; even as it left his hand, before his arm had fallen again by his side, the afflatus of law and order came upon Henry. He seized the offender, grappled with him, and, a constable coming up at that moment, his prize was easily secured.

It was effective; but not exactly as Henry had intended. There was a cry,

taken up by many voices, a swirling and gathering and trampling in the crowd; and, before he realized what was going to happen, some six hundred men were sweeping back upon them, armed now, and formidably enough, with good stout bludgeons torn from the piles of faggots on the neighbouring quay.

After that life, for a while, became little more than sharp throbs of mere sensation. Surging, struggling, giving and receiving blows, and scarcely conscious of either; a wild confusion; now and then a sound forcing itself upon his understanding, out of the universal hubbub. Once—a sickening crash, different to that of the clashing truncheons, and some one at his side swayed and fell, and did not rise again. Henry fought on, blindly, instinctively, unaware even which way the fight was tending, till he found the noise and press

somehow subsiding, and the party of order victorious, with several bundles of sticks to serve as trophies. Breathless, bruised, yet not feeling his bruises; torn, thirsty, but triumphant, he leaned up against some railings watching the tumultuous tossing of the mob sink, by degrees, into such sullen heavings as swell the sea after a storm. The crowd did not actually disperse; but it grew so much quieter that, about half-past two, the constables were able to retire into the Mansion House, and Henry, brought to a strong sense of the need of rest and refreshment for himself, made his way back to his inn,—a very different figure to the irreproachable gentleman who had left it in the morning.

It was about this time that Anne received the note from George. Living in a retired street, she had scarcely noticed

any disturbance, so that his news surprised rather than alarmed her. One faint thrill of desire swept across her mind, when she read his injunction to stay indoors; one passing gleam came into her eyes of the old unhallowed instinct for a row. But her strength and spirits were not what they had been; she contented herself with sitting at the window, watching such strayed revellers as drifted through the street on their way to livelier scenes. She found no difficulty in believing George's assertion that there was no danger; indeed it was hard to see what harm could come to him, merely sitting on guard in a wholesale ironmonger's warehouse. Considering the nature of the goods, she rather wondered that they should take so much trouble about them. Dusk came, and George did not return; but the signs of disturbance went on in-

creasing, till even that quiet neighbourhood was quiet no longer. By nightfall Anne was getting nervous. The dreariness that always came upon her with the twilight took possession of her. She rang for lights, rang and rang again; but no one answered. She had not courage to go wandering about the dark stairs and passages; when the light failed more and more, she crept again to the window, whence she could see the lamp burning in the front passage of an opposite house. And as she sat there, a ringing clatter sounded down the street, and then, compact and orderly, a little body of horsemen came into sight. As they went past at a brisk trot, Anne saw the light flash upon their helmets; then she knew that the soldiers had been called out, and, for the first time, a pang of real terror shot through her. She went to

the door and called softly; there was no answer—her voice sounded hollow, in the dark and silent house. More frightened still, she rushed back, fled into her own room, and then fairly sprang into bed, covering her head with the clothes, and feeling there alone a sort of refuge. It was not till much later that the landlady, suddenly remembering her, sent the girl up with tea and candles. In fact, the whole street had long been disorganized; everyone dropping in on everyone else, retailing, confirming, embellishing news caught up in hasty visits from their mankind, who wandered in and out, always drawn back again to the centre of disturbance, which was also the centre of attraction.

Even Sir Henry had felt it, had yielded to it. For once nature asserted itself in him; as dusk drew on, his philosophy

failed him. He could not concentrate his mind on the letter on the political situation which he was composing for the *Times;* something impelled him to go out once more, and see how the actual situation stood.

Once back in Queen's Square the same curious fascination held him. He heard, or rather saw, the Mayor reading the Riot Act to the mob, now thicker than ever, and with temper decidedly the worse for hunger and other stimulants. He saw—and was capable of surprise in the seeing—that the proclamation, delivered amidst a shower of stones and brickbats, had not the slightest effect upon the hearers. They tossed more wildly, rushing beast-like with yells literally for blood:—"Give us the Recorder, and we'll murder him!"

When, a little later, it seemed that the Mansion House itself had been taken by

storm, when doors and windows went down, with crash and shiver, before the blows hailed upon them, and the furious mob were pouring in through the breach,—there came upon him a horror, which would not let him turn away his eyes for very dread of what he looked to see: a grey head down among those trampling feet; some such frantic yelling scramble, as he had watched on hunting days with calm satisfaction; a brief, bitter, clamorous worrying, and then— He turned sick with the thought, and could not but look still. Kept at bay in the lower part of the house, by the constables who defended the staircase, the cry of the assailants changed: "Burn the Recorder alive!" Henry looked for the leaping yellow of the flame. But probably, by this time, the confusion was too great for any deliberate design to have a chance of being carried out. At

any rate, though straw was at once thrown into the lower rooms, and though many voices were clamorous for a light, nothing came of it. In point of fact, so far as Sir Charles himself was concerned, nothing came of the riot at all. Even as this was going on, he was making his escape, adventurously enough, out of the house; and the same night he left the town altogether.

From dusk it grew dark; and still Henry felt he could not choose but stay. He stayed till, at nightfall, the arrival of the troops, flashing and clattering into the square, put a stop for a time to the attack upon the Mansion House. He stayed expecting, half in approval half in dread, the sweep of horse and glitter of bared steel, the sudden waver of dismay, the shriek of flying crowds. It never came. The long-suffering dragoons walked their

horses gently up and down among the people; the storm of missiles hurled at them from all sides could not disturb their cheerful composure. Henry might be excused if he thought, as he did, that the scene was more creditable to the discipline of the troops, than to the judiciousness of their commander.

The night wore on; he had seen two dragoons severely wounded; had seen an officer, stunned or taken by surprise by a sudden blow, fall heavily from his horse; seen him carried senseless through the crowd. Still the mob remained in possession; if the attitude of the troops encouraged them, rather than otherwise, it was little wonder. One charge was allowed; a charge conducted with all possible precaution against inflicting injury. More thanks were due to the mere physical weakness of human nature, than to the

authorities, for the comparative quiet which at last began to fall upon the town.

Even so, it was not till some time in the small hours of Sunday morning that Henry went back through the now tolerably quiet streets—greatly marvelling. Anne was sleeping and waking in troubled starts; George, in the little office behind the warehouse, sat watching the grotesque shadow of his drowsy companion, as it nodded and drooped, in the lamp-light, upon the whitewashed wall. He himself might have seemed lost in thought; yet in truth he was not thinking. What should he think about? Should he linger with regret upon the past? With the death of his illusions had died even the power of regret. Should he think of the future? For him there was no future; nothing but the dreary present extended through the years. He watched, then, neither to hope

nor to regret, solely because the watch gave him a certain sense of being on duty, and duty was the only thing left in his life capable of giving him active satisfaction.

Sunday morning dawned, wet and cheerless. The weather looked gloomy enough to have quenched any amount of popular enthusiasm. But it was not quenched, and the action of the military authorities added fuel to the flame. At eight o'clock the piquets were withdrawn ; in less than an hour after their withdrawal, the Mansion House was being sacked. The victors got at the cellars—with the natural result. A mob sober, so far as it can ever be called so, is not a considerate or disciplined body, nor very accessible to reason ; a mob three parts drunk is certainly open to one argument only, and that argument was not applied. So far from it that, before long, the rioters had the satisfaction of

hearing that the 14th were well on their way to Keynsham.

Poor old Mr. Adams, the foreman, came back aghast from a brief reconnoitring expedition. He had reached Queen's Square just after the departure of the troops had been publicly announced; had seen the Mayor's proclamation torn down and scattered in shreds to the winds; had seen the luckless bill-sticker who had put it up, hustled, buffeted, dragged along with jeers and execrations, blinded and half-suffocated with his own paste-kettle, which some practical humourist had thrust down over his head; had seen a knot of clambering, noisy, drunken rascals crown the head of the king's statue with a draggled, woe-begone Cap of Liberty. It may be that this last outrage impressed him, and many other respectable citizens, more fearfully than greater enormities — it

seemed ominous of the spirit of the rioters. But he certainly had some reason for the wringing of hands with which he returned, exclaiming—

"We must all look to ourselves, now; the town is at the mercy of the mob."

All the while, in strange contrast, the bells were ringing as usual for morning service. And, in spite of the general disorganization, it would seem that a certain number of persons obeyed the call, for it was to the various churches and chapels that the Mayor sent messengers, as the danger grew more pressing, to summon citizens to the Guildhall.

Sir Henry was among the church-goers; but he had no thought of obeying the Mayor's summons. It was Sunday, and Henry was honestly incapable of spiritual common-sense. As he had, with difficulty and perseverance, made his way to church,

through the thronged and seething streets, unmoved save to a calm regret, so he calculated upon walking back. But it was not to be. He had not gone far, before he found that he had got into a human current which threatened to be too strong for him. It was no longer the uncertain swarming multitude through which he had fought his way before; now he was in the midst of a crowd with a purpose; the stream set definitely in one direction, and against his will he was borne along with it.

It was towards afternoon that the watchers in the warehouse saw suddenly, first, a thick cloud of smoke rise grey and threatening through the universal greyness, and then, cruel and pallid-looking in the daylight, tongues of flame darting and sinking under the sullen pall. The Bridewell was in a blaze. At the same moment, far off still, but rolling steadily nearer, came

a sound. Nothing terrible as yet, in itself, and yet mysteriously fraught with terror. At first an indistinct hum, this growing into a trampling, again as it drew on asserting itself as speech—an unruly tide of feet and voices. And the tide stopped at the warehouse door.

The mob did not seem to intend an attack, and on the summons of the ring-leader—a well-dressed man, who was conducting the proceedings under an umbrella—George thought it best to go to the door. The others crowded on behind him; most of the workmen were by this time gathered to the defence. Politely but firmly the friend of the people made his requisition: two dozen sledge-hammers, two dozen crowbars and wedges, and three pairs of spanners to take off the nuts from doors. He did not mention the subject of payment, but, turning to

his orderly following, he did observe impressively that he should expect to see all these articles returned to the warehouse. Which all owners of property must have felt to be very reassuring.

It was rather a bitter moment to George. It was hard to have to yield to brute force, harder still when the force was of a kind for which his disgust scarcely surpassed his contempt. His glance swept the street for a moment; it seemed to him a thing incredible that a whole city-full of law-abiding citizens should submit to be over-ridden by these ruffians. Hanging about the outskirts of the crowd, lining the streets as spectators, looking eagerly from every window, he could see hundreds of respectable-looking persons. Yet not one, by so much as a sign, arrayed himself on the side of order.

With a smothered ejaculation of disgust

George resigned himself to the inevitable. At his orders the workmen collected the tools, and began to pass them out to the mob. As the work proceeded, the excitement increased. In spite of the ringleader's efforts and exhortations, the rioters pressed fiercely about the door, clamouring for a share. When the supply stopped some half-dozen sturdy ruffians made a rush. George sprang forward into the street, hurling back the foremost from the threshold. At the same moment the door of the warehouse was shut and barred behind him, in a sudden panic of the confused leaderless men within. George heard the rattle of the bolts; but, even as he angrily realized what had happened, two jolly sailors in the crowd, now surging on again, caught each an arm into his own, with a—"Come along, mate, and see the fun." He struggled furiously, but

uselessly; the pressure on all sides forbade any successful resistance. George, in his turn, was caught by the current and carried helplessly on towards the gaol.

The sledge-hammers and crowbars came into play. Rattle, crash, and thunder, the blows came down upon the heavy gates, half drowning even the uproar of the mob. The gates quivered and shook; and resisted still. The blows redoubled; stalwart artisans, the muscles standing out upon their arms, the drops pouring from their brows, smote and smote again with a will. The gates swayed, groaned, and gave way.

A wild rush; shouts and yells; the crash of furniture; sudden heavy splashes, as all movable objects were flung into the river; and always the steady hushing patter of the rain. A clatter of hoofs at the gate; a wavering and a pressure;

then wild cheers of exultation, as the third Dragoons, suddenly wheeling round, rode off as they had come. The cells were burst open. Their prison clothes torn from their backs, half naked, wholly bewildered, some one hundred and seventy prisoners found themselves pushed violently forward into liberty, amid a perfect storm of cheering.

And so, all in a moment, came the climax of two lives. From so far apart, after so long a time, they had drifted together here; to touch for one tremendous instant—scarcely of recognition,—and never to touch more. For as one of the released men was tossing about at hazard on the waves of wandering humanity, he saw a face in the crowd. It was pale now, stained and splashed with mud, the cold eyes dazed with dismay, the lips—those fluent pitiless lips—

parted in gasps of exhaustion. But he knew it, and a great content came upon him. He snatched up a hammer from among the trampling feet.

"I didn't guess it would be here, and now, but I knew I *would* be the death of you yet."

Henry heard that; he felt the grasp on his throat; he saw the swing of the iron. Then all sounds swam together in one great rushing roar; all light was swallowed up by one great onflowing tide of blackness. There was a horrible crash —and the mist cleared away. A little way off, a man was struggling in the grasp of some of the better class of rioters. Nearer, close at Henry's feet, some one lay very still; people were kneeling and stooping about him. Some words came from Henry's lips; he did not know what they were himself, but

one of the men busy on the ground seemed to be answering him.

"Whoever he was, young man, he saved your life."

Then Henry knelt down too, and began to mutter incoherent gratitude, for the shadow of death was on him still, and he scarcely felt sure as yet that he was alive. But there was no answer, and, as his senses cleared, he began to understand. There, in a pool of blood, frightfully battered and disfigured, only not quite out of recognition, lay the body of the man who had saved his life.

Anne Paton was wandering up and down, in and out of her desolate rooms.

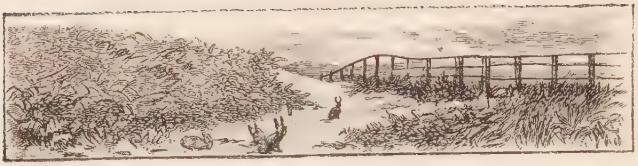
A great restlessness was upon her that afternoon. All at once she heard the door-bell ring; then all restlessness suddenly passed away. Very softly she stole out on to the landing. There was

a long pause ; then the door was opened. Next, a loud hysterical scream. Anne knelt down, holding by the banisters. Some one said sharply—"Hold your tongue, or you'll kill her too."

"Too?" Anne said to herself, half aloud. "Who is she? and why do they say 'too'?"

Holding very carefully by the rail, she began to go down stairs. When she got to where she could see into the passage, something was being carried into the ground-floor lodger's parlour. There was a little stoppage in the doorway—a bearer stepped aside, a covering slipped off—

"George!"



CHAPTER IX.

WIDOWED.

MANY weeks later Anne awoke to consciousness, a widow and childless. The room was very clean and tidy, much more so than usual; there was a pleasant fire in the grate, and where the blind fell a little away from before the window she could see, as she lay, how the snow had drifted up against the pane in the corner of the sill. When she had looked at it awhile, she began gently to wonder. Memory began to struggle back to life, but she was so weak that the struggle hurt her. She put her hand to her

head—the movement was a great exertion — and would have brushed aside the heavy tresses which seemed to heat her brain. They were gone; her hand touched only soft downiness, just beginning to grow again in loose rings like a baby's. This was too wonderful; she spoke a weak little word or two, and then felt someone in the room get up and come to her.

It was a strange woman, of whom Anne got only a general impression of brown and white, and an elderly face. She seemed pleased, in an unemotional, professional way. But when Anne would have questioned her, she enjoined silence so despotically that, after meekly receiving a spoonful of some kind of nourishment, Anne ceased to speak or wonder, and fell asleep. From that time she began to make a slow recovery; but it was nearly

Christmas before she could leave one room for the next. There had been a terrible scene when she came to her remembrance, and it threw her back a great deal. Still, a vigorous constitution and careful nursing triumphed in the end; and by the close of the first month of the new year it was evident that, under strangely new and rather perplexing conditions, she was to begin life over again.

It was not Anne who felt the difficulty most. With the touching confidence whereby the born Bohemian, alone of all the children of men, seems able, without effort or exertion of principle, to imitate the birds and flowers, her future had not yet begun to trouble her. So long as daily supplies held out, it never would. When they gave in, she would turn indifferently to any of the professions which Bohemia recognizes; and no false shame

or nasty aristocratic pride would have interfered to complicate her choice. At present the money came in all right; so, at least, she supposed, seeing that no unpleasantness had arisen as to rent or bills. But where it came from, or even whose it was, was a question which had never occurred to her.

In other quarters there were more searchings of heart. Henry had been entirely generous; he had borne the cost of a most drearily elaborate funeral, and of a long and expensive illness, not only without a murmur, but with satisfaction. Anne had wanted for nothing, either of care or comfort, that money could procure. If it had fallen at all less heavily on him than he had been prepared for, it was only because Hester insisted on contributing her share out of her own private purse. But he could not be expected to go on

keeping his sister-in-law entirely for an indefinite period. What George had left was insufficient to provide for her, without help from her own exertions. Now, therefore, that she was able to do something for herself, it became a question how best to give her a start. Henry did not contemplate consulting her tastes too curiously in this matter. His own experience of them, and the facts he had gathered while in Bristol, made him not unnaturally distrustful of them. Here was an opportunity such as never might, and probably never would, occur again, of setting her back in the paths of social respectability.

He conferred with Hester. His own inclination was to send her back to Clapham. Could he but once get her again under her father's roof, Henry would be relieved of a responsibility he did not covet. But to this he did not really hope

to get Anne to consent; it was too much to expect that she should. For though Captain Paton had written professing his willingness to be reconciled, the terms proposed were too hard for human endurance. In fact, they amounted to unconditional surrender; he demanded a submission which would have been abject for a criminal. What, then, should they do with her? She was too ignorant for a governess; her deficiencies in spelling alone would condemn her. Again, all those situations for which aspirants advertise themselves as "thoroughly domesticated" were, by that single epithet, closed at once and for ever to Anne. Finally it was decided to try and get her some pupils for singing.

Armed with this proposal, Sir Henry went over with Hester, one day in February, to lay it before Anne. It was

more than two years since the sisters had met, and, on this occasion, the one was as ready to be emotional as the other. They had a very tender meeting. Anne looked touchingly lovely. Her weeds, frightful in themselves, seemed to take grace from her wearing of them; and the appearance of extreme youth, which she owed in great measure to her still short hair, whose baby rings would struggle out from under her cap, lent extra pathos to the general effect. She was utterly submissive; she let them settle all the details. She was so subdued, that Henry felt he might venture to cheer the prospect for her a little. The suggestion he had to make was, in his opinion, so wildly Bohemian, that he had misgivings about producing it, but Anne's chastened condition seemed to justify the experiment.

"We know, dear Anne," he said, "that this will be a great change for you. It

will be a life of strict routine and attention to duty; and I fear, dear sister, that your past career has been a poor training for such a life. Conditions in which a mind well-regulated from its childhood would find its happiness, you may, perhaps, find dull." (Anne gently shook her head, pressing Hester's hand.) "Well, we will hope not. Still, it may be that you overrate your strength, and it is well, perhaps, not to have the bow always on the stretch, most particularly in the early stages of reformation. Now, what do you say to this?" He gave an encouraging smile. "Your playing, indeed, does not equal your singing, but it is, I think, good enough to allow of your taking an occasional engagement to play at a juvenile party. How say you? It is a concession, of course; but sometimes a concession, even to one's self, may be the

truest wisdom. And I think you would like it."

Anne answered chiefly with a faint smile. It was really two or three months still before she recovered her spirits enough to do justice to the exquisite nature of this suggestion; but when it did once strike her in all its beauty, it supplied her with a fund of innocent merriment for many a day thereafter. But that was still to come; at present she was passive. In a few weeks she was established in a quiet little lodging in Clifton, a fair number of pupils had been procured for her, and she was well started on the road to respectability.

Oh, the narrowness of that road! In after years, Anne often wondered how she could so long have endured its limitations; how her feet could so long have kept the sober pacing measure it required. Yet

at the time she scarcely felt it. Rather, perhaps, she was unconscious of how much utter dreariness had to do with a depression of spirits which she honestly believed to be solely due to grief. For the first few months, indeed, there never was a more exemplary widow. As usual, she threw herself into the character as it were by instinct, and from an artistic necessity of living up to it. Without any conscious affectation, she learned a way of managing her pocket handkerchief, which was nothing less than touching; her voice acquired modulations unknown before, and her smile was more pathetic than tears. Sir Henry was justifiably proud of her, and in a certain circle she was quite the rage.

And in all this she was scarcely insincere. It was not natural, it was not genuine, and yet it was far from being hypocritical. She knew so well what the situation required

her to feel, that she quite believed she felt it. There is no such power for self-deception as a strong dramatic instinct. Few women can quite distinguish between the feelings of the imagination and the feelings of the heart; and if this is the case with the least imaginative of the sex, infinitely greater is the confusion in the mind of one who is an actress born.

Anne never tried to unravel it. Self-inspection was neither her strength nor her weakness. She was working out, to the best of her abilities, a new conception; in so doing she evolved a complete set of new sensations, and whether these came more from the head or from the heart, she cared little to inquire.

That this should last was, of course, impossible; that it lasted so long as it did was largely due to circumstances. Anne was entirely separated from her old com-

panions. Among them, too, things had changed. Emma Barratt was married. She had married a gentleman in the public-house line, and retired from the stage, and had lost thereby that vague extra-social position, which comes from having no certain position at all. The public-house defined the situation; henceforth she fell into the ranks of the recognized, and Bohemia pure and simple knew her no more.

One Sunday she came up to see Anne, accompanied by her husband. They made a considerable sensation among such of the neighbours as saw their arrival, and were generally put down as relatives of the late Mr. Paton,—scandal, itself, refusing to connect persons of their manner and appearance with the sweet, refined-looking young widow, sister-in-law of a baronet. The visit led to no renewal of intercourse;

it was, in fact, the last, as it had been the first. Emma did not definitely make up her mind that it should be, but somehow the time for the next never came.

Anne lived on in her quiet lodgings. Her companions were budding maidens of sixteen or seventeen, her pupils. These worshipped her with the frantic and rather fatiguing enthusiasm of their age; slipped little notes into her hand at parting; brought their albums for her to write in; and begged humbly for locks of her hair, which they would allow her a glimpse of, at some future day, tied with blue ribbon, and drawn mysteriously from some sanctuary near their heart. Her amusements were long strolling walks, over the detested Downs, with one or other of these unimpeachable adorers; now and then, an evening of tea and music, with their mammas and sisters, (when all their man-

kind chanced to be out of the way); or of tea and cribbage, with their maiden aunts. There was novelty about the life, certainly; but it was a novelty calculated soon to lose any charm it had ever possessed.

There came a day when her weeds—her cap, her veil—became a burden to her. She was standing at her open bedroom window, as so often before; the hawthorns were draped in bridal veils; green, and blue, and gold, crowned with clearest sunshine, and triumphant with the song of birds, summer was beginning her progress through the land. A little wind was whispering, "Come;" telling of waving grasses on the edge of cliffs, of sparkling leagues of green and purple sea, of white sails dancing on to fairyland. All in a moment, she knew not how or why, Anne felt a horror of herself as she stood there—the only stain upon the splendour of the

summer. She hated her black; it was an anomaly and an oppression. Suddenly she locked the door; then, half frightened at her own revolt, she slipped off her woeful trappings, tore off, with a sort of impatience, the restraining cap. Then she loosed her golden hair, now fairly grown again, and shook it out about her face and shoulders, and so stood all in white in the sunshine, her beautiful arms and neck gleaming, her fair face flushed at once with shame and pleasure. So she stood awhile, and felt that joy of living was come back to her, and hope, pointing to all the boundless possibilities of youth.

That day the tide turned. But Anne was not conscious of this at first. In a few minutes she put on her old robes soberly enough, and thought, perhaps, that she had gone back to her old feelings, so unchanged were all the conditions of her

life, so monotonously did the days glide on. It remained for the first break to enlighten her.

Towards the end of the summer, that came. She went home on a visit, home to Clapham. It was against her own judgment that she went; and her judgment was so much more the result of instinct than of reason, that it was likely to be correct. She had put off the visit as long as she could. Ever since Easter her mother's letters had been more and more pressing; Captain Paton, even, had sent messages of a conciliatory kind. In fact, they looked upon her as a reformed character. Henry's reports of her exemplary behaviour had convinced even the Captain, who had seriously resented her flight, whereas her mother had only deplored it. Anne was not unthankful for the reconciliation, but she knew how

dangerous a meeting would be to these friendly dispositions. At last, however, she could think of no more excuses; or, rather, to have raised any further difficulties would have only led, by another road, to that breach which she was sincerely anxious to avoid.

So on a quiet September evening Anne came home. A leaf, too early dead, of the chestnut-tree at the gate, dropped upon her sombre gown, as she passed beneath it and went up the old remembered pathway, between the flower borders, towards the house.

Two years ago, in the grey dawn of the morning, she had hurried stealthily down the same path; her eyes dim with angry tears; her heart in a tumult of indignation and revolt too great to admit of regret, or of any remorseful lingering over the last vision of the house from which she fled.

She had never thought to see it again. But, then, life and all the world had been lying before her, and, with the blood of generations of seafarers pulsing in her veins, the past had been little to her to whom so wide a future was so near.

Now—Certainly, at two-and-twenty, life could not be said to be over for her; far, indeed, were such morbid sentiments from herself. Still, she had gained experience. She had found out that, though the world in itself is wide, it is only possible to inhabit one portion of it at once, and that, circle for circle, her new one, though it might have been pleasanter, was, after all, but little wider than the old. She had gone out, as all youth goes out, expecting to "permeate space generally." She came back convinced that there were physical, if not moral, limitations which must for ever render this a baseless dream.

So far all was well. With such sentiments it might have been hoped that she might, after all, have adapted herself to her old home-life. Liberty, without which she still held that nothing is good, no one could pretend to deny to a widow; however dear it may be at the price, that is a privilege common to them all. With liberty, then, secured to her; with her views of life's possibilities theoretically at any rate modified by experience; why should not she have got on well enough at Clapham? Why should not her visit have been a success?

According to their lights, all concerned did their best to make it so. Mrs. Paton herself was roused to a languid excitement. Since Hester's marriage she had been growing ever more and more apathetic; she had not even taken to pets. As for Captain Paton, probably he had never

looked at his daughter with so much satisfaction before. He would make excuses to himself for coming into the room, to watch her sitting at work; her golden head, in its mournful covering, bent over the poor clothes which her beautiful hands, unadorned save by the simple wedding-ring, were busy fashioning. He was very gracious to her, and she was not ungrateful; but the oppression grew and grew.

Oh! those long evenings in the bosom of her family, watching the hands of the clock crawling, crawling on to bed-time; conversation practically impossible, seeing that the subject of the past was forbidden, the present exhausted, and the future a blank. If she sighed—a converted yawn—they both looked at her, and Mrs. Paton sighed too. And for one hour by the clock Captain Paton made a point

of reading aloud. He had chosen Young's "Night Thoughts," as suitable to Anne's condition; and she never dared not to listen, because he expected intelligent comment at the end.

Sometimes, when he had raised his spirits sufficiently by this exercise, he would ask Anne to give them a little music. Then Mrs. Paton would wake up, (for Anne was convinced she possessed some mysterious power of retiring into unconsciousness with her eyes open), and say, "Oh, do, dearest! that is, if it will not be too much for you." Anne used to be at her wit's end to know what to sing. Even the most mournful ballads were deemed too frivolous for the situation. Once, when she tried the "Banks of Allan Water," as being sufficiently lugubrious, she learned, from chill silence at the time and mysterious hints the

next day, that love, in any form, was a subject even more taboo for a widow than it was for a school-girl. After some moments of blank surprise, she yielded even this point; but it made the choice of songs very difficult.

The evenings were only a few shades more dismal than the days. Her parents took it for granted that her life henceforward was to be a walking in shadow through a vale of tears. No attempt was made to amuse her, none to give her society. If some very intimate friend ever ventured to ask her to spend the evening, it was with the earnest assurance that they would be quite alone. Once there was some general parochial gathering; business first and pleasure (tea, talk, and a little music) after. To this, in consideration of its serious side, it was decided that poor young Mrs. Paton

might be invited. Anne went, to escape, at least, one home evening.

She went, not expecting to find much amusement, but a little cheered by the mere thought of mixing again a girl among other girls; of holding court again, even among the few and dull young men who attend such festivities. She had never been more mistaken. Between her and youth was an impassable gulf. The girls acknowledged her not; when she tried, almost humbly, to introduce herself among them, she felt a restraint growing upon the group; by ones and twos, she scarcely knew how, it melted away about her. What could a widow have to do any more with youth or life? The ranks of girlhood were closed to her for ever. A curate, whose profession gave him a sort of prescriptive right to devote himself to affliction, did come over to her, and

spent more time beside her than was strictly necessary in politeness. But meaning glances soon recalled him to his duty, and Anne was left alone. She belonged nowhere; socially she was annihilated. The young men and maidens giggled and chattered among themselves; the young married women sat together in groups, and discussed their babies and domestic affairs; the elderly ladies wandered on about sewing-circles and the last new preacher; the elderly gentlemen got into corners and dozed, or buttonholed one another and prosed. Where, in all this, was Anne's place?

When she got home, she sat down on the floor, quite in the old style, and cried bitterly in terror and dismay. Nothing that had ever happened to her had frightened her so much, as the prospect that had opened out to her that evening.

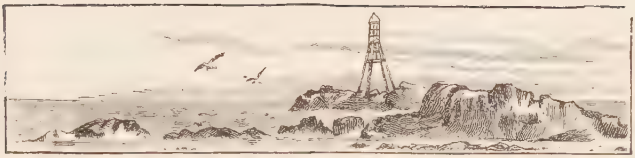
When she had finished crying, she got up, and went to the looking-glass to take counsel. Was life all over then for ever, after all? Was this her portion—a place among the middle-aged and old? And she was but two-and-twenty. Her soft red mouth had lost no power for smiles, or sweeter poutings; her eyes were bright with all the eager hopes of youth; her cheek flushed and paled, with every hasty impulse of the heart of youth.

She called to mind all the widows whom she had ever numbered among her acquaintance, especially those she had known in the experience of the last two years. But she found little to enlighten her. She had known several, it is true, and these had all seemed to find life jovial enough—which was so far reassuring. On the other hand, they had all happened to be on the riper side of

middle age. It struck her, on reflection, as remarkable, that she had never met with a young widow. Her position seemed anomalous; there was nothing to guide her as to her probable development.

Of one thing she felt very sure: that it would be well to get out of Clapham as soon as might be, into some sphere which should, at least, offer wider possibilities. For at Clapham—— She shivered, and in her heart looked back to Bohemia. For there, after all, was her native land; there she could find out what became of young widows, nor look forward to the discovery with entire dismay. And, for a moment, it floated across her mind that, somewhere in Bohemia—she knew no longer where, but *somewhere*—there was a certain lank, shambling prince of that land, with an eye ever ready for a twinkle and a tongue

ever ready for a jest; one whom no catastrophe could confound, nor stroke of fate subdue; whose hand might she but touch once more, in pure good fellowship, she too might gather heart for aught that could befall.



CHAPTER X.

RENEWALS.

Anne went back to Clifton ; back to her pupils, her work, her solitude. She had meant to break her bonds, to renew her youth ; had half-expected to find circumstances themselves changed, her life of its own accord broadened and brightened. Of course nothing of the kind occurred. There was no change, and the very spirit to make any seemed to fail her, alone as she was, with no creature to offer her a helping hand out of the strait and gloomy places in which she seemed doomed to walk for ever—mere prolonga-

tions, she fancied, of the tomb. The weather, to which she was ever sensitive, added to her depression. It was a warm, wet autumn, very cloudy, and unusually still. Her weeds were no longer an anomaly; they became sympathetic with nature, akin to the sodden trailing brambles, to the heavy windless plash of autumn rain, to a time when every hue was turned to greyness, and every sound to sighing. Moreover, the days of anniversary drew down upon her—those dreary days, so fruitful of regrets, so barren of hope, so rigid in their insistence on the irrevocable, that, even when recurring in the midst of happy hours, they have power to chill the sunshine. If Anne had hoped to forget, she had no chance. The public nature of the events which had led to her widowhood made public property also of its anniversary;

everything was matter of comparison with "this time last year."

It came; a heavy, dispiriting day, a day of dropping leaves and rank odours, so redolent of mortality that on it even a free fancy might turn instinctively to graves. Anne put on her deepest garb of woe, and betook herself to the cemetery. She stood at last beside the solidly and correctly hideous monument, that Henry had erected. Now and then a sob shook her. It was a perfectly genuine one, for indeed she felt very miserable, though how many causes, apart from widowhood, went to making her so, and what precisely was their nature, she did not inquire. She knew she was miserable, and that was enough to make her cry as a child cries, with much of the unreasoning abandonment of a child. In truth she was disappointed. She had held out her hand, timidly but not unhope-

fully, to the Future and it had met nothing but the dead-cold clasp of the Past; and now she was passionately ready to believe that, for her, no Future was to be at all.

In that hour Anne touched despair, which, indeed, is a depth easily reached by persons of her temperament, and, happily, not a very fathomless abyss.

By-and-bye, as her emotion grew, the heavy folds of her veil seemed to stifle her; with a gesture as of rending the garments she flung it back, and stood revealed in the beauty which not even tears could destroy. And as she did so, another visitor to the cemetery, who had been observing her in a furtive, uncertain sort of manner for some time past, came nearer, paused a moment as if in doubt, and then exclaimed—

"It *is* Anne! I was sure of it! Oh! my poor, dear girl!"

Anne looked up, and there, looking at her across the grave, was Lady Mary Ponsonby.

It would not have been easy to determine, at a glance, in what capacity Lady Mary was visiting the cemetery that afternoon. To have come as a mourner her attention seemed scarcely concentrated enough; at any rate, for some time past, she had been wandering somewhat aimlessly among the monuments, partly reading the inscriptions and partly watching Anne. On the other hand, neither was her manner that of a mere sight-seer. She was very serious, and was dressed in that sort of compromise between woe and the world which elderly ladies assume, when it is their intention to pass the rest of their days in the garments of mourning. But all doubt was put an end to by her next words.

"To think that I should meet you here,

and both of us come about the same thing! But, my dear, yours is a much nicer wreath than mine; now, I daresay you made it yourself. *I* don't know how, so I am obliged to get them from the shops, and there's no feeling about the things *they* send you. But oh! my dear, to think that at your age you should be a widow, too. There, my dear, oh! my poor dear, don't cry so." She was crying unrestrainedly herself, by now; she had drawn Anne down to sit beside her on a flat tombstone, and was fondling her hands. "Yes, I know all about it; haven't I gone through it myself? But you must remember he's much better off now."

She had no suspicion of having implied a sarcasm, nor did Anne's conscience go out of the way to detect one. On the contrary she had a general idea that something comforting had been propounded;

but it did not touch the real springs of her grief just now.

"Life is so long!" she sobbed irrelevantly.

"Oh! do you think so?" said Lady Mary naïvely. "But indeed it *is* too long, and too short as well, to be spent in fretting. Why how old are you, my dear? Twenty-two! My poor child, you have had no life at all; and *you* to be thinking it long!"

"It *is* long, to be all over," wailed Anne; and there the secret was out.

"Ah! I know what that feels like, too," sighed Lady Mary; "but, my dear," she went on earnestly, "there's no such thing as a life that is all over—short of dying. Why, even an old woman like me can tell you that, on the faith of her own experience. And as for you—trust me, all the best part is to come."

This time Anne did not speak, but in her eyes was the first ray of light that had shone in them since that evening at Clapham.

"You have been too much alone, my poor dear, that's what it is. Now I shall insist on your coming to stay with me, as soon as ever I get back to London. It will be quite a kindness to me, for you know I am all alone now. Louisa is married; she was married two years ago last summer, just before poor Mr. Ponsonby's health gave way. Yes, it was in that autumn the doctors ordered him to Clifton; but he didn't live out the winter." Here she wept a little, then dried her tears, and went on, "And this evening you must spend with me, and tell me all about it."

Anne thanked her, with lips and eyes, and Lady Mary departed to her carriage.

As she passed the monument she gave it one parting glance, and murmured under her breath—

"It *was* the cousin, then, after all. I always felt in my mind it would be."

Lady Mary spent a most delightful evening, and retained some very interesting and touching impressions. For these, she herself was a great deal more responsible than was Anne. Anne was, in fact, but a poor hand at narrative, and she simply followed Lady Mary's lead, and Lady Mary set out with the definite expectation of hearing a romance. Consequently a romance was exactly what she got—and this though every fact was accurately related. Such is the value of a judicious exercise of the arts of selection and suppression.

The promised visit could not, after all, be arranged for before the Christmas

holidays, but, from the time of her meeting with Lady Mary, Anne's dark days were over. Even though, in a few days, she was left alone again, though her life slipped back into the old groove of forlorn drudgery, she never again reached the depths of depression from which she had then been rescued. Lady Mary's relations to Anne, in the past, had been rather of the nature of an unrequited attachment, but now she had her revenge, so to say; the girl clung to her as those cling who, on the point of sinking, feel beneath their fingers the saving plank.

When, in due time, Anne did go up to London, she found a *ménage* which had its comic points. Left to herself, without even the passive restraint of Mr. Ponsonby's prejudices, Lady Mary's spontaneous instincts and universal tastes might have been expected to have full

play, with results which might have been startling, but could scarcely have been surprising. And, no doubt, this is what would have happened, but for one circumstance. Louisa had married, as her mother had told Anne, and she had married a man in the diplomatic service. Now Louisa, with all her good nature, was a young woman possessing a certain passive force of character. Totally destitute herself of originality, she had no greater mind than her father to see to what lengths this quality might carry Lady Mary. She had not much authority over her mother, and would have been too dutiful to exercise it if she had. But having a certain sense of humour, she had early hit upon a plan which she worked out with very creditable success.

One afternoon she came and paid her mother a visit in state, having previously

sent a note begging to see her alone, thus effectually preparing Lady Mary's mind for almost anything in the way of a disclosure. After a few trifling remarks, and answers made in a manner so absent as to excite the elder lady's curiosity to the highest pitch, she plunged at once into business.

"Is it really true, mamma," she said, "that you had M. Wolkonskwy here last night?"

"Yes, my dear; he was as nice as possible, I assure you, and he sang us his last new song divinely. I don't understand Polish myself, but it sounded very fine. Why, my dear, there wasn't any harm in it, was there?"

"And I told Augustus I was sure there had been a mistake!" exclaimed Louisa despairingly. "I told him that my dear mother had his interests far too much at

heart not to give up *anything* rather than to risk—— Oh, mamma! How shall I ever undeceive him? I scarcely dare to think of it! If you could have seen how his hand shook as he put down his cup—he never touched another bit of breakfast after he read that! 'Louisa,' he said, 'I am compromised.' He said it twice over; and then he got up and rushed out of the room, and I heard him order the carriage at once to go—to—to—the Russian ambassador's!"

Here Louisa retired behind her pocket-handkerchief.

It required, perhaps, a Celtic imagination to rise to an unhesitating belief in this story; but Louisa had not calculated on it in vain. With Lady Mary the power of faith was always in inverse proportion to the measure of probability. The more hopelessly unlikely a thing might seem

to the average mind, the more readily did she credit it; that it should satisfy her imagination was all she ever asked of any statement she was bidden to accept.

Now she sat trembling and conscience-stricken.

"My dear, what shall I do? Oh! Louisa, tell me it isn't so bad as all that!"

"I can't tell, mamma," murmured Louisa, despondingly, still behind her handkerchief. "But you and I can do nothing now, except keep quiet. Oh! it is such a terrible responsibility, mamma, a position like yours and mine; if I had really known what it would be like, I believe I should scarcely have had the courage to accept it — not even for Augustus! To think of all that a word, a look even, may do for mischief! Oh!

when the eyes of half Europe are upon a man, how can any one notoriously connected with him be too careful, too discreet! The interests that are at stake! The souls that may be launched into eternity, by some trifling act of indiscretion on our part—a thing which would not matter in anybody else!"

"I'll never, never commit another," wailed Lady Mary. "I'm sure I never guessed! But, from to-day, I'll never do a thing, nor see a person, without asking you if it is quite safe."

"Dear mamma, I knew that was how you would take it," said Louisa gratefully. "But indeed you *will* be quite safe if you keep in the ordinary lines of society; with that as a general rule, and your own clear sense to guide you in details, I think, I hope, that you need have no fear. I *think* not."

"Oh! but I'm sure I can manage that," said Lady Mary, with confidence.

She never had managed it yet, and no one knew better than Louisa that she never would. All that this ingenious young matron had ever hoped to do was to somewhat circumscribe the eccentricity of her mother's orbit; and in this she did hope to be successful.

And, in fact, she was. When she had been reassured as to the consequences of her patronage of M. Wolkonskwy (a supremely harmless individual, in whom no government on earth ever had taken, or would take, the slightest interest), Lady Mary began rather to enjoy the delicacy and importance of her position as mother-in-law to the Corps Diplomatique. She felt herself nothing less.

When Anne paid her visit, about six months after this interview with Louisa,

she found her hostess in a state of suppressed elation, holding the balance of the destinies of Europe, only occasionally threatening its equilibrium by some slight freak or social experiment.

But Anne was far too ignorant to appreciate the humour of the situation; indeed, it is doubtful whether she realized the situation at all. Anne lived intensely, but she did not live widely; she cared quite as little for Europe, as Europe cared for her, and the relations of Lady Mary to her own individual self were the only ones that had any interest for her.

And to herself Lady Mary was very kind. In fact, she had settled in her own mind that the time was fully come when Anne ought to console herself. That a pretty, lively girl of two-and-twenty should be vowed to perpetual widowhood was more than even she could think in-

cumbent on the heroine of the most interesting romance. And with much zeal, and rather less discretion, she did her very best to put her guest in the way of consolation.

Anne did not rise to the occasion; in fact, it cannot be said that the occasion rose very readily to Anne. Lady Mary had made a mistake. Society was willing enough to recognize the girl, after a fashion, but it showed no disposition whatever to amalgamate her. A romantic history is a sort of passport, no doubt; but it is one which admits the bearer only within certain limits, and those limits are very clearly defined. Anne, who indeed felt no inclination for consolation of Lady Mary's kind, was very indifferent. She was distracted, amused; but she was not, after all, comfortable or happy. With all her adaptability, in that world, at that

level, she could never be at ease again. Yet this she did not herself thoroughly understand.

Meanwhile, Lady Mary seemed at least determined to cure as much of Anne's depression as might have arisen from too great solitude. She would not go for the most trifling errand, for the expedition the least generally interesting, without the girl's company. Anne, who was grateful for the intention, submitted rather than enjoyed. But she could have found it in her heart to rebel when, one morning, her hostess smilingly produced an immense roll of manuscript, and informed her that this was a five-act tragedy, which a young friend of hers had written. A gentleman of much experience in the theatrical world had promised her an interview on the subject that morning, and Anne must come with her, and read extracts. It made such

a difference in the chances of the piece, if it could be read by someone who understood reading.

Anne did not bless the memory of her instructors at that moment; but there was no help for it, and soon after breakfast they set off. The ideas she associated with the name of gentlemen of much theatrical experience led her to expect that their way would lie through quarters rather picturesque than polite; she was just a little surprised to find the carriage stopping in a street which, if not fashionable, was at least respectable. A tidy maid ushered them upstairs, and into a rather stiffly tidy drawing-room with folding doors. It appeared that an unexpected engagement had prevented the gentleman of experience from being actually at home to receive them, but he quite expected the lady, and hoped she would wait for

a period which could not exceed a few minutes.

They sat down. Lady Mary was very skittish that morning. This expedition was the nearest approach to a lark which she had enjoyed for a long time; and she left the consequences to Europe to their fate, with a sort of defiance, and did enjoy it very much. She could neither be silent nor sit still. To the breach of all etiquette she kept wandering about the room, examining everything, looking into the books on the round shiny table—annuals, a directory, and such-like entertaining literature. And, ever more and more, she drifted towards the folding-doors.

"My dear," she said, in a delighted whisper, "do you know what that room behind there is? That's his study; his own working-room. I saw a glimpse of it through the door in the passage. Oh,

such a mess, of all sorts of delightful things! I've never seen the study of a man of this kind; it must be so interesting. I would—so—like——" By this time her hand was on the lock. "And, do you know, I will! Just a little look. We've scarcely been here a minute; he can't be coming yet. But if you should hear his step, just cough. I'm only just going to——"

The door was pulled softly to behind her. Anne was left alone, having little heard, or heeded, her companion's remarks. And, almost at the same moment, the door into the passage opened, and a man came in. He came in with apologies, but they changed upon his lips into a sort of cry; it was the sound of welcoming surprise. Anne looked up, then sprang to her feet, holding out her hands.

"Oh, Horry!" she cried; and at the

instinctive word, Bohemia received her once more, and she was at home. "Oh, Horry, I have been so miserable; you can never think how dreadful everything has been!"

CHAPTER XI.

BETWEEN THE ACTS.

During the winter that succeeded her visit to Clapham, the eye of watchfulness, which her kinsfolk had hitherto kept upon Anne, relaxed a little in its office. An event of absorbing interest had taken place at Ridgelands shortly before Christmas; and, in the contemplation of their son and heir, both Sir Henry and Hester nearly forgot the existence of their convert at Clifton. Anne had written a very properly expressed letter of congratulation, with a touch of pathos in it. It was the first letter Hester answered with her own hand,

and gave her real pleasure; but they had never heard from her since.

One day, months later, Hester, looking over some old correspondence, found her sister's last, and was a little startled when she saw the date. She sat down that same afternoon to write again; but the days lengthened into weeks, and no answer came. They grew anxious, and it was decided that, at the first convenient opportunity, they should go to Clifton and pay Anne a visit. However it was early June before the opportunity arrived.

When they reached her lodgings, Anne was out. She might be expected back at any minute; so they waited, and in about a quarter of an hour she made her appearance. Whatever might have been the cause of her long silence, it was clearly not ill-health. When she came, rather hurriedly, into the room, even Hester was

struck with the brilliance of her beauty. Since her return from Clapham she had modified her mourning; indeed, it was modified fairly beyond recognition as such. She wore a gown of some soft light material, of a shade much nearer lavender than grey. Her bonnet, though plain, was of white straw; she stood swinging it restlessly by its long lavender strings. In her hand was a great bunch of hawthorn, in which she buried her face, from time to time. As sweet a vision of the spring-tide as one could wish to see; but, viewed as a broken-hearted widow, the effect was a little startling. In fact, the interview began with a rather awkward pause. It was evident that Anne was no more prepared to see her visitors, than they were thus to see her. But she was the first to recover sufficient presence of mind to begin to talk.

She talked on and on, mostly in questions; but Hester, at any rate, was not deceived by the mere appearance of interest which she gave to the answers. When she could think of no more, even about the baby, she still kept up a stream of prattle, in which facts were the last things that could be discovered. All the time, even Henry felt something in her manner which was new to him. If it had been any one but Anne, he would have said she was fluttered; she had lost something of her gay directness; she was certainly softer; her laugh, though seldom ceasing, had lost much of its elfish ring.

Somehow, conversation languished. Henry tried to question her on the history of the last few months; but she always contrived to evade giving any real information in reply. At last, at the end

of her resources, she fell back once more upon the baby. Henry, touched by this persistent interest of the childless mother, graciously invited her to spend a week at Ridgelands, that she might make its personal acquaintance.

Now Anne was not given to blushing; but when, after a moment's hesitation, she accepted the invitation with fervour, Hester, chancing to look towards her, saw her suddenly rosy-red from neck to brow. When one woman sees this thing in another, the situation must immediately become either confidential or extremely strained. In this case it became strained. So much so that, in a few minutes, the visit was at an end. Anne kissed Hester with unusual affection, but the salute was returned with some restraint. Henry she thanked again and again for his invitation; she hoped he would be able to fix

an early date for her visit, while dear baby was still at this charming age.

When they were gone, when she had watched them well out of sight, Anne began to laugh, but to laugh amid a sudden flame of blushes. By-and-bye, mirth got the better of confusion; with the old mischievous sparkle in her eye, belying the demureness of her lips, she sat down by the table and began to write.

"My dear Brother and Sister,

"You will, perhaps, be a little surprised to hear that I am going to be married to-morrow"— (Her pen, which had dashed off the confession at full speed, paused; she leaned her cheek upon her hand, and sat staring at the page for a good while. What she saw, in place of the words, she had no words

to say, or only such, perhaps, as were not to be said to her present correspondents.) "—to Mr. Timbs." (Here she paused again, hesitated, half formed some letter; then, with a sudden impatience, she muttered, "Well! of course it will all come out, so better from me than from any one else.") "He was at one time manager of the Bristol Theatre, but soon after the riots he gave it up, and is now doing well as the manager of a popular theatre in London. Dear brother and sister, I know this will be a shock to you, but I could not help it. I tried to tell you this afternoon, but the words would not come. Dear brother and sister, I am very happy. I feel as if I had got straight for the first time in my life. I have made a great many mistakes, and people have made a great many mistakes about me; but that is over now, and why

should we rake up old grievances, I against them, or they against me? Rather, now, let me thank you for much kindness shown to me when I wanted it very much. You may be sure I shall not forget it; I only wish that you would be able to think as kindly of me as I always shall of you.

"And now, with best love, I am your affectionate sister—for the last time,

"ANNE PATON."

When she had finished and sealed this letter she sighed with a sort of relief; a certain weight was off her mind. The strands which bound her to the past were severing fast; there was but little more to be done. She went upstairs, and put a few finishing touches to a pearl-grey silk—her wedding-gown of the morrow; then did a little aimless packing. Then

she grew restless, and went down again. The shadows were lengthening across the daisied grass; the last sun of her widowhood drew near its setting. Anne stood by the window, waiting and watching, a little smile of expectation on her lips and in her eyes, a little rose-flush of pleasant agitation on her cheeks. She was watching for the last coming of her lover.

Presently he came. Gaunt, ungainly, sallow, and hollow-eyed as ever, he was by no means an ideal lover of romance. But Anne had never been romantic; for her he was all that could be desired. In fact, Horatio had a happy manner, as a wooer. It was neither so passionate as to fatigue her, nor so modest as to provoke her. It was a happy medium between audacity and timidity; if it inclined decidedly towards the former quality, it is likely that Mr. Timbs knew what he was about.

Perhaps Anne never reflected on the amount of practice that must have been required to produce so much perfection; on the other hand, it may be that she took many preliminary flirtations, as part of the natural order of things in the existence of a bachelor. It may have been so; Anne had never refused to recognize facts, never upbraided life for not giving her things which, in her experience, life never did give to anybody. Now, even, that she was honestly in love, after her fashion, she was not sentimental. If she did not think her lover absolute perfection, this much may be said for her —that she had twice tried perfection, in various forms, and had every reason to feel that something less would suit her better. But, when all is said, she had best explained herself in her letter. She could not help it, for she had found her

fate. It is true that she was well contented with it.

Well content she felt that night when, every preparation made, save one, she sat down to reflect a little while, before she took the very last step of all. Anne was as little given to reflection as any rational being can be; but the most thoughtless of womankind can scarcely altogether escape from thought, on the eve of her wedding-day. In a certain sense the situation was new to her. If it was not the first time that she was on the point of being married, it was the first time that she had been the least in love. The last days of her engagement to Henry Stephens had been passed in wild despair; she had married George in a red-hot excitement of revolt, which left no room for thought. Now she was about to marry, as average women do marry; only

a little more friendless, a little more unfettered by any ties of former things, than most women of no more than twenty-three, even if they are widows. But, after all, it was only in a very limited and conventional meaning of the word that Anne could be called friendless; no person of so sociable and unexacting a disposition could be really without friends —of a sort, perhaps, but, if they were the sort that suited her, it mattered little about that.

And she was content. She had but expressed herself with perfect truth, when she asserted that she felt as though she had got straight for the first time. No more struggle between the life imposed upon her from without, and the life which she felt within. No more need for revolt; for victories which could but lengthen her fetters by a link, or defeats which added to

their weight. She had got things straight. Out of the tangled web of cross purposes, in which the thread of her life had so long been fretted and frayed and warped, she had brought it at last, still bright and strong for wear, henceforward plain to follow to the end. Truly Anne was fortunate! So many changelings as go about the world, never to find their own; so many square pegs as must go through life, in holes, in whose atrocious smoothness of sweep not a nook is to be found, into which an unfortunate angle can fit itself!

If she was fortunate, she knew it; and no doubt gratitude had a large share in her meditations. And as gratitude is a softening emotion, and as success tends to forgiveness, it could not but be that she should grant a regret, a pang of pity, to a life which never had got itself straight. A life once linked so closely to her own, only

to the further complication of both; their ineffectual struggles to escape, each towards its own place merely, resulting in a more hopeless tangle.

If they had never joined, both might long since have worked out their own freedom; one reckless hour had so confounded things, as to make the cutting of the knot, in his case, indispensable to the peaceful unravelling of it in hers.

In that hour of satisfaction, Anne gave him, not pity merely, but remorse. It was not very keen or very deep; but, such as it was, she freely offered it up to his memory. If he had lived, compunction would never have visited her; she could never have reproached herself, ever so slightly, for having spoiled his life, while writhing under the perpetual consciousness of how hopelessly he had spoiled hers. But the victor, the survivor, could afford

to be generous; to regret her share in the misery of one, who proved to have had such a little time in which he might have put in happiness.

She rose slowly, at last, and there was a little cloud from the past upon her brow; a shadow from the great outer darkness of the might-have-been. She stood a moment, as if reluctant to move; then, with a sigh, she began to cross the room. The moonlight lay broad along her path; with her shower of golden hair flowing over her white dressing-gown, and her bare white feet bathed in silver, she walked shining, like a spirit. On a table in the window lay her little old school-desk; she took it up, and brought it back to where she had been sitting in the narrow circle of the candle-light. Kneeling down, she touched the spring of what her childish fancies had rejoiced over as a secret drawer

—a most transparent secret now, if, indeed, it ever had been hard to discover. From this she took a small packet; inside lay a little red-gold curl, glittering in the red-gold light.

Anne took it up, twisted it round her fingers, laid it caressingly against her cheek. "Poor baby!" she murmured. "Poor dear Tessa! But she will be happier with George; she always took to him most."

She kissed the little curl, and laid it back in the paper; her face was grave, her eyes were a little wistful, but she did not weep. Then, slowly, she took off her wedding-ring. A little while, she knelt there, with it in her palm; now and then she stroked it softly, as if in compassion. At last she laid it carefully upon the gleaming hair; then refolded the paper, sealed it, and replaced the packet.

"Poor George!" she said. "Poor George!"

She knelt on some time longer.

> "And her eyes are set in a stare,
> And anon there breaks a sigh,
> * * * *
> A long, long, sigh."

It was the last. Far off, solemn, sweet, and faint, came the boom of the cathedral clock. Anne roused herself, and listened; she counted: "One, two, three——" It was midnight. With a sudden impulse she rose, and went to the window; she threw it open. The midnight air was drenched with the scent of hawthorn; a nightingale was singing near.

She leaned out, and let the music and perfume work their spell upon her. When she closed the window, and turned away, the rose of dawn was already on her cheeks, and her eyes needed veiling, even

from the moon, for the brightness that was in them. The night was over; it was June, the month of roses; it was her wedding-day.

THE END.

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